



POLAROID

Lawless by TumbleTree

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Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Calvin Powell, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Phil Callahan, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

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Summary:

“Bi-Billy,” it wasn’t a question. If anything, it was a demand, a demand to be heard, to *listen*. With sweaty hands, Billy pressed the phone harder against his ear. ‘*Fuck,*’ he wished Max and Lucas weren’t with him. If they weren’t then he’d be over to Stevie’s in a heartbeat.

“Billy,” she wheezed again. “*Billy* I’ve been shot.” Something inside him froze, he could feel his grip tightening on the steering wheel and his neck prickling with a familiar sense of danger. His Stevie was *hurt*. “I need- I need help. *Please.*”

Ignoring the fact that he had two teens in the back of his squad car and was probably committing about twenty violations; Billy pressed down on the gas *hard*.

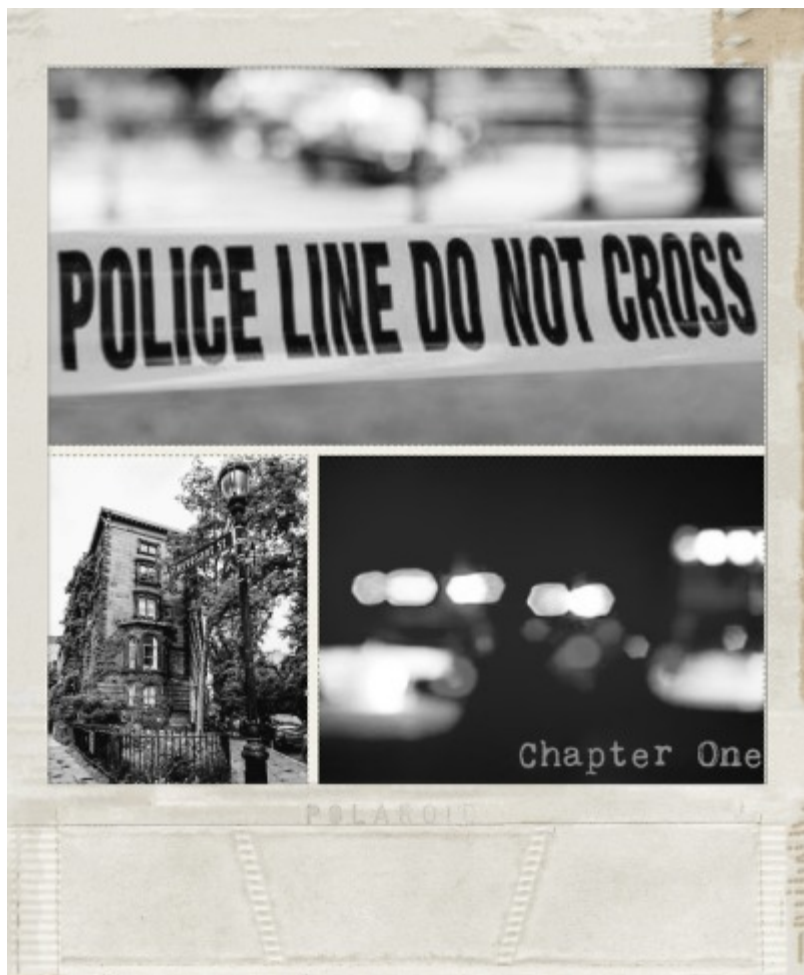
“I’m on my way. Just stay on the line sweetheart.” He ignored the alarmed shouts from the back as he did a vicious U-turn.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

First ever multi-chapter Haringrove fic! Lemme know what you think and *please* be gentle with my baby. He's not completely done yet, but I plan to either post weekly!

I would also like to say: **this is a fictional story and I will not tolerate threats or insults!** If you have a problem with a genderbent AU then *don't read this story*. I never thought I'd have to make a note like this and I don't mean to offend any of my peeps, but I felt like I needed to say something. Thanks for your time and enjoy the story I took time and put heart into!



“And his eyes will only know darkness,

His ears will only know hatred,

His hands will only destroy,

And from his feet,

Obscurity shall walk.”

- Unknown

Hawkins, Indiana

April 7, 1988

6:17 pm

It was a quiet spring night in Hawkins, Indiana. The kind of night where you could feel the pressure of impending rain, with an undertone of darkness. Hawkins had been facing a drought for a few weeks now and even a short sprinkle would be a blessing. People were just chalking up the dark feeling to how the grass was turning back to a sickly yellow, the kind right before the first snowfall. The people of the town seemed to sense the omnipresence of something *more* than just a storm though. Something darker. There was something coming from the looks of it and it wasn't going to be pretty. Everyone, but one seemed to take the feeling of wrongness to heart.

Miss Marissa Walden had just arrived home from her shift at the town's library. She was the stereotypical library attendant, big rounded glasses that, when resting on her chest, was held up by a chain necklace. It had been five years since the night Will Byers went missing and came back from the dead. Within those five years, Miss Walden had aged. She wasn't the brown, bright eyed librarian anymore. Over time, the constant wear and tear of being the only person working at the library had gotten to her. Now, she was a dull eyed woman with brown hair greying at the temples from stress.

With the walk of the world weary, Miss Walden fished her keys out of her purse as she made her way to the apartment she now lived in. In the last few years Hawkins had grown in size. While, it was still a small town, it now had condominiums, a brand new garage and a shopping plaza that the Hawkins natives now had to contend with. Because of these developments, the town had to go through their budget and hire new police officers. Miss Walden paused in her musings when there came a slight rustling from her left. It came just on the edge of the tree line and had her heart racing with some unknown fear. The sound slid to the back of her mind when she thought of one specific police officer that had just been hired.

While it was true she and the Chief had been on a date, it had quite literally been *one* date. And ended with him never asking her out again. She tried not to think about it, but she definitely thought

about the new hire. Deputy Hargrove was a fine young man. She knew she was old enough to be his mother, but a woman couldn't ignore how tight those police issued pants were on him or how the shirt seemed one flex away from being ripped. She sighed wistfully as she pushed open her door before quickly shutting it. That miniscule fear that she was being watched resurfacing, even as she closed and locked the door before slipping her shoes off.

Deputy Hargrove. Ever since it came out that his father was an abominable human being and an even worse father, well, Billy Hargrove went from being number one delinquent to citizen of the year, especially when his step mother lost custody of his step-sister. The way he had stepped up and claimed her as his own, well, it was just nice to know there were still men out there like that, she hummed softly to herself as she changed into a soft pair of pajamas. It looked like it would be a no dinner night, not that it mattered, since she had had a long day filled with the company of books, and moms and their crying infants. She popped a few aspirins while pouring a glass of water. With a jerky swallow of water, the pills disappeared down her throat. Miss Walden sighed before placing the glass into the sink.

With tired feet, she sleepily made her way to the bedroom before promptly collapsing onto the mattress. She fell asleep almost instantly, thoughts of the Chief and Deputy Hargrove following her.

9:33 pm

She woke to the sound of someone knocking. Silence. Then the abrupt noise of glass shattering down the hall. Gasping and chest heaving, Miss Walden surged out of her bed and raced to the bureau where she had put the cordless phone into its charging station. Heaving a sigh of relief that it was fully charged, she went into her closet and as quietly as possible shut the folding door.

She stood there for a few minutes, listening to the sounds of the

intruder going through her things. Remembering the phone clutched tightly in her sweating hands, Miss Walden dialed the police. Pressing the phone to her ear, she listened in the heart pounding seconds for the dispatcher to pick up. The sounds of the intruder were getting closer, at that, she crouched down and slid backwards into the corner of the tiny closet.

“Hawkins police station,” the sound of Flo’s friendly voice caused her to release a muffled sob. “Ma’am? What’s wrong?”

“There’s someone in my house.” Miss Walden whispered, “I need someone to come quickly. *Please* .” She muffled another sob at the sound of more glass shattering.

There was a pause before the dispatcher asked, “where’s your house ma’am? I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.”

Miss Walden would have laughed if the situation wasn’t so dire. Everyone knew where everybody lived in Hawkins. It hadn’t changed that much in the last five years.

Taking a fortifying breath, “I live in the condominiums on Stuyvesant Street.” The dispatcher, which she knew for a fact now was Flo, sucked in a surprised breath.

She heard the click-clacking of keys on the other side of the phone. “Okay. I’m sending someone your way right now.” Miss Walden released a relieved sound, it was too loud. The noises down the hall stopped, she could hear the distant whispering that slowly grew louder. “Ma’am I just need you to stay-”

Miss Walden cut Flo off. “Oh god! They know! Please send someone quickly.” She sobbed, a trembling hand trying to mask her voice and the fear that bled through like an open wound.

“Don’t worry Ma’am. The police are on their way. Just stay put and don’t make anymore noise, okay?” Flo didn’t realize, but she would be the last person to speak to Miss Marissa Walden. The bedroom door was pushed open with such force, it bounced off the wall with a *crack*. All that could be heard in the ensuing silence was Miss Walden’s shaky breathing, Flo’s own calm breaths and the sound of

someone sifting through her things. Slowly making their way to the closet.

She watched in abject horror as a shadow fell over the door, which she could see through the small crack between the bottom of the door and the floor. The door banged open, Miss Walden screamed. Before Flo could tell her the police were on the street and to stay quiet, there came the horrifying *bang* of a gun going off and a *thump* of what Flo hoped wasn't a body.

9:08 am

Jim was hoping to spend the day with Joyce and the kids. He had actually planned to show Will how to properly shoot a gun because he vaguely remembered the kid telling him how he had almost used one against the demogorgan. Jane could also use a little practice at it, just so she had something else that could protect her. He didn't want her to rely on her mind for everything. Instead of these plans coming to life, Jim woke up to the sound of the phone ringing.

With a groan, Jim extracted his arm out from underneath the body next to him. Rolling over and out of the warmth of the bed, he pulled on some pants and stumbled his way out of the room. Making his way to the kitchen where the phone continued to ring with a high pitched shrill, his head throbbing in tandem. Angrily, Hopper ripped the phone off of its platform and slammed it against his ear.

"What?" He snarled. The words slightly masked by the cigarette he shoved into his mouth. As he looked around for an ashtray, Jim half listened to the lazy drawl of Callahan.

"Morn'n Chief," Phil started, Jim could distantly hear the sound of the deputy shuffling paper around before continuing. "We gotta problem down on Stuyvesant Street. At the condominiums."

Jim hummed, not really listening to him. It was probably another

home invasion, they already had ten calls this past *month* of some burglar. It had gotten so bad, they had to redirect the calls to a second phone in the station.

“Chief,” Phil sighed, his tone causing Jim to stop his fruitless search for the ashtray. “You remember Marissa?” At his confused silence, Phil released a snort, “the librarian?”

Jim made an ‘ah’ noise when he realized who they were talking about. “Yeah ‘course. What does she have to do with Stuyvesant Street?” He finally spotted the tray. As he stretched his arm across the table, Phil finally got to the point of his call.

“Well, she’s in the hospital for attempted murder,” Jim dropped the tray, wincing as the ceramic cracked against the table. “She took a bullet to the head Chief. They don’t know if she’ll make it.”

Forgetting about the tray, Jim stood up and started thinking about what he needed. “Alright. I’m on my way. Don’t let anyone into the building until I get there and get me the security video.” He scooped up his belt from the kitchen chair, tucking it through the belt loops of his pants. “Is Hargrove there?” He didn’t wait for an answer, “have him on tape duty. It’s gonna be a long day.”

It looked like an innocent enough burglary had gone seriously wrong. If Marissa survived, Jim would be looking for an attempted murderer. If she didn’t, he’d be looking for a murderer.

10:23 am

Pulling up to the crime scene, Jim had to pause and take a few breaths after shutting off the jeep. Leaning against the steering wheel, he watched as Hawkins reporters and nearby town journalists pressed up against the yellow ‘*Do Not Cross*’ tape. Like a silent shadow, albeit an angry one, Hargrove stood on the other side, watching the flies in case one tried to zip under the police tape.

With a sigh, Jim scooped up his hat from the dash and hopped out of the truck. As if sensing his presence, all of them turned as one, reminding Jim of the demodogs. All synchronized and shit. He wished he could lawfully use his gun, but beggars can't be choosers. Instead, he had to man up and skillfully push his way through the throng of buzzing flies.

Hargrove, the little shit, stood back and watched Jim's slow progress. Only stepping in when one eager reporter tried to follow him across the tape. Jim held back a laugh, only allowing a huff of amusement when the reporter backpedaled to try and escape Hargrove's overly excited grasp. The kid had probably been waiting to go at the reporters for awhile now and Jim was almost inclined to let him. But since there was actual camera crews here, he didn't think it would be such a great idea.

So, with a gruff, "knock it off kid," Jim made the short walk to the front door of Marissa's home. Hargrove easily eating up the feet with his giraffe legs and reaching the door before him. Jim ignored the kid in favor of asking on his two other deputies, "where's Powell and Callahan?"

Hargrove gave such an enthusiastic snort, it made his nose scrunch up and his eyes squint shut. He always forgot his newest deputy was just a kid, but in moments like these, Jim had to compose himself. Sometimes though, it was hard. Sometimes he wished he had been the one to have seen the abuse first hand. Sometimes, he wished Hargrove had left. But he knew that wouldn't happen, Hargrove had made a life here in Hawkins.

"Welp, Callahan is off getting the security video from last night," Hargrove drawled, his finger tapping against his thigh, a nervous habit he never grew out of, "Powell's walking the perimeter." Jim hummed in acknowledgement, he wished he had a cigarette, but the thought slipped away when he walked into Marissa's home.

As they walked into the building, Jim wouldn't have noticed there had been an intruder. Everything looked where it should be. The mail was in place, no signs of wandering hands. All knives in the kitchen had been left alone and could be accounted for. It was as he walked past the bathroom that Jim saw it.

Right below the small window, was the toilet and below *that* was a glittering teal mat. It would've looked normal, if not for the pieces of glass being the very thing making the mat sparkle. Slowly, Jim stepped into the closet sized room and glanced around. Everything looked like a single woman's bathroom, nothing was out of place except for the shards of glass. He clambered up onto the toilet and started fiddling with the window, which was how Hargrove found him.

"What the hell are you doing?" He demanded, Jim didn't have to turn around to know that the kid's eyebrows were under his short curls. The kid hadn't even thrown a goddamn fit when he realized he'd have to cut his mullet, Jim thought that would be the line and he'd never see the kid again. Instead he had been surprised to see Hargrove the very next day with short hair and a superiority complex about a mile long.

With a grunt and one last push, Jim managed to open the cracked window. "Somehow they got in through here." He carefully pivoted on the toilet seat, so he could face Hargrove, "it's a lot of work, I mean they woulda had to shimmy the window open and push the screen out of the way."

Hargrove gave an unimpressed look, "they'd have to be pretty small and where'd the glass come from then? The window isn't cracked or broken." Jim huffed and hopped down from the toilet.

"They knocked over a figurine," he said, taking a few steps back so they were pressed shoulder to shoulder.

Hargrove narrowed his eyes at this, "how'd you know that?"

Rolling his eyes, Jim pointed to the one spot on the back of the toilet that wasn't covered in dust, "looks like they knew how to get in, but didn't didn't realize that they might need to look down."

"Which means they've never been here before," Hargrove finished for him. Jim gave him an approving nod. "You think the lab had anything to do with this?"

The thought *had* crossed his mind, but this was sloppy work. And

Hawkins Lab never made a mistake twice. “I don’t think so, but let’s keep that in our back pockets. I need to see the closet first.” Hargrove nodded and led the way to the bedroom.

The sight was gruesome and not something he would forget anytime soon. As they had progressed further down the hall, Jim could see where the suspects had started to lose their meticulous search effort, putting a point against the Hawkins Lab idea. It had been frenzied and almost panic-like. It seemed like they hadn’t found what they were searching for. It was when they entered the bedroom that Jim was glad he hadn’t had breakfast. The smell alone would have set the stronger stomachs of the deputies off.

Fortunately, Jim had worked in the city and seen worse things, although this still was in his top ten. While, Hargrove had lived with the smell of blood and tears all his life. The bedroom was a disaster, the bed overturned and the dresser in pieces. A lamp was shattered completely, a needless act of violence. Jim already knew without having to look, some of Marissa’s jewelry would be missing. What took the icing on the cake was what could be found inside the closet.

“Did they take pictures before she was moved?” He asked, slowly crouching down in the doorway of the closet. Hargrove didn’t reply, but Jim saw him nod. He had to take a minute to compose himself.

The stench of blood was so thick, it was suffocating, making it hard for Jim to concentrate. Upon closer inspection, he could see a dark brown stain of blood that had dried as it had been trickling down the wall. Mixed in with the blood was bits of gray brain matter. Marissa’s phone lay less than a foot away from the shape of where a body had once lain. From looking at it head on, Jim noticed the angle of the shot seemed to have been taken downward. Jim didn’t want to think of why that was. There was no bullet casing.

He groaned as he pushed his way to his feet, “I’ll need more pictures taken and the security video from last night.” With that, Jim turned away, brushing past Hargrove and going out into the hallway.

“Where are you going?” Billy’s voice called after him.

Jim didn’t stop as he answered, “I’m going to the hospital.”

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

I've decided to post weekly! Sorry this chapter is so short, I promise to make it up to you guys next Friday!



"Friends can be the best co-conspirators in charting the unknown."

- Judith Orloff

Hawkins, Indiana

April 8, 1988

11:01 am

The Hawkins hospital wasn't that great. In fact, it could barely constitute as one, with its faded brick and cracked pavement, it had actually once been an old factory the town renovated into the hospital. Instead of trying to make a completely new building, the town focused on remaking itself in the last five years, because of this, they had neglected to fix up the town's only means of care. So it was far from impressive.

And *fuck* , did Jim hate it.

He didn't hate Hawkins' hospital specifically, he just hated all of them. He could barely look at one without the memory of his baby. She had been gone for so long now, he had started to forget the sound of her voice. Only videos and the occasional nightmare brought it back to the forefront of his mind. He missed his Sarah, but he forcibly had to push the morbid thoughts away. He wasn't here to get lost in the memories, he was here to find a would-be killer.

And he had El now. She would never replace Sarah, but she kept the nightmares at bay and filled that empty hole that had been left ever since Sarah's passing. When he was done with this, Jim was going to take her and Will out to lunch. And if Joyce was available, then he was going to drag her along too. With the promise of lunch and good company, Jim grabbed his hat from the dashboard, making his way to the hospital's double doors.

11:15 am

Billy had been staring at his coffee for so long now the creamer had started to separate itself from the water. He was sure if he dumped it out, the sugar had probably started to congeal. He almost wanted to do just that, anything to get the sight of Miss Walden's blood and brain matter out of his head. It wasn't the first time Billy had seen

blood, hell he had seen his own more times than he could count. And he had seen enough kids breaking into places they shouldn't, where the homeowner had to go to the extreme. It usually resulted in said kids having to go to the only available hospital. So yeah, he had seen blood, either his or someone else's. But this was the first time he had ever seen a crime where the perpetrator had purposely hurt someone else.

And they had, that is, purposely hurt Miss Walden. Hopper would verify this thought eventually, but until then, Billy was going off a hunch. And that hunch was in part due to his years of being purposely hurt, he knew the difference between someone trying to defend themselves and someone hurting another for fun. He *knew* the difference. They just had to wait until it would be known whether Miss Walden would survive or not and whether he was going to be searching for a thief or a murderer.

Until then, Billy was going to continue his staring contest with his cold coffee. He didn't even know why he ordered it, coffee gave him serious headaches. Hopper must have rubbed off on him since it was the only thing Billy had ever seen the man drink.

Billy was startled from his coffee debate when a plate was placed down directly across from him, loaded with pancakes, eggs, bacon and toast. It was soon followed by Max holding a cup filled to the brim with chocolate milk.

Before he could comment on his sister's life choices, Stevie plopped herself down next to him. Since the booth's weren't made for two grown adults, Billy had to wedge himself into the corner of the booth. At least this way he could have his eyes on his two best gals. Stevie would kill him if she knew he thought of her like that. Thankfully he wasn't ever going to tell her and Max had sworn secrecy.

"I thought you were supposed to be working?" Billy raised an eyebrow at Stevie, who ignored him long enough to steal a piece of bacon off of Max's plate.

"Hey!" Max yelped, smacking Stevie's wandering hands away, nearly knocking her chocolate milk over in the process.

“Oh please. I paid for this you ungrateful gremlin.” With the bacon firmly in her fingers, Stevie turned to Billy. “My shift doesn’t start until 11:30. Why? You gonna arrest me for being late.”

“Don’t tempt me sweetheart,” Max choked on a slice of pancake. Billy knew the look he was giving the brunette was probably not appropriate for a family friendly diner. It didn’t stop him from winking and laying his arms across the back of their booth, his fingers just brushing Stevie’s curling hair. It always did that when it was humid out, Billy wondered if her hair would do that in another hot situation.

“You left pretty early,” Max started, taking a huge slurp of her drink. Billy wrinkled his nose in disgust, but didn’t say anything to her prodding. “I heard your radio go off and you took the cruiser instead of the camaro.” When Stevie gave him a concerned look Billy inwardly cursed at Max, he didn’t think Hopper would appreciate them getting information that no one else knew.

“Yeah, Flo called me in. Something came up at the condominiums.” He figured being as vague as possible was okay. If he didn’t give any names, plausible deniability.

Even with his reassurance, Stevie’s big brown doe eyes hadn’t lost their concerned hue, “isn’t that the twelfth call this month?”

“Eleventh.” Billy sighed, sinking low and hoping the booth would swallow him up.

“So what’s the difference now?” Max piped up, shoveling eggs onto her fork, “you’ve never had to go to these calls before.” Billy hated when Max was being smart, he couldn’t exactly explain to his seventeen year old sister that he had just seen the most gruesome thing in his life. It was worse than that time he took a demodogs head off with one swing. Max still hadn’t forgiven him for the haircut she had to get. He had almost felt bad. *Almost.*

11:15 am

“The likelihood of her making it...” the doctor trailed off, before taking a deep breath. “It’s not looking good. We’ve done everything we can. I’m sorry.” With that, the doctor turned and left the room, leaving Jim with a comatose Marissa.

He stood there for a long time, unsure what to do now that his only witness was on the verge of having her plug pulled. Her grandmother would be here soon to make the decision, although she had a long drive from Chicago so the likelihood of her being happy seeing a cop here was not good. He’d have to make his visit short and to the point, first starting with her head wound. There was just something about it, it didn’t make sense.

Looking around to make sure the doctor wasn't coming back, Jim cautiously made his way to the bottom of Marissa’s bed. Without hesitation, Jim scooped up her charts. He needed to see what the damage was and he wouldn’t find out until after she was gone, so with no one the wiser he’d just do it now and get a head start on the investigation. What he saw made his heart stop for a second, before quickly catching up and making his chest *ache*.

It looked like the bullet had entered through the left side of Marissa’s frontal lobe before lodging itself in her lateral sulcus. The procedure had taken multiple hours, so Jim wasn’t surprised that they couldn’t do any more. Instead he was surprised that Marissa had managed to live long enough to be found and transported to the hospital. But the ultimate surprise that caused trepidation and an unknown feeling, that couldn’t possibly be fear, to build up inside of him, was the sight of the words *‘trauma: gunshot wound to the upper left frontal lobe’* and *‘Description: narrow entry wound to the left section of frontal lobe.’*

He stared for a long time at the words and got to the point where the words started to float around him. He wouldn’t ever forget them. Especially because this meant that whoever had shot Marissa had done so with the intent to kill. The intruder or intruders may not have known she would be there, but they had gone into Marissa’s home armed and with the intent to hurt in case someone was there.

The other horrifying realization, which Jim was sure the coroner would prove if Marissa didn't make it, was that the perpetrator had walked up to her and pressed the gun to Marissa’s head before

pulling the trigger. Which meant the thief knew what they were doing when they pressed the gun to her skull and had consciously made the decision to pull the trigger. The image painted by this scenario wasn't pretty and set his teeth on edge.

Jim needed to call Hargrove immediately and get back to the crime scene to see the tapes from the night before. With a new sense of purpose, Jim replaced the charts at the end of the bed and gave Marissa's foot a gentle squeeze before exiting the room.

3. Chapter 3



*“ Every man needs his Siren
To check his courage and strength
When he hears her song*

In his travels through the unknown. ”

- Dejan Stojanovic

Hawkins, Indiana

April 8, 1988

12:11 pm

Stevie liked working at the diner. While it didn't make a lot of money, Stevie liked meeting new people and the few that came from all over the state and then some. She liked listening to their stories and the short little reprieve it lent her when the day was slow going; but sometimes those stories transcend into the awkward. Like right now for instance.

The two reporters weren't even from the town, or at least Stevie had never seen nor heard of them. The man and woman sat by the window, in the only corner booth of the whole diner. Everyone that came in usually fought over that seat; in one remembrance instance, Billy had none too kindly told an out of townner where they could place their fork if they didn't move *right then* . Stevie had never been so horrified and turned on at the same time. When it came to Billy though, Stevie got used to the feeling.

But there was no Billy to tell these newcomers where they could stick their utensils. Instead Stevie had to go to refill their coffee mugs for the *fifth* time. As she stood there pouring the too strong brew into the generic white ceramics, the two reporters continued on talking as if she wasn't even there.

“This is insane! I mean who goes and kills a librarian?” The man said, nearly choking on his toast. The woman raised an unimpressed eyebrow and took a sip of her now full mug. As she placed it down, Stevie started to top it off.

“How do we know she's dead. The Chief in this damn town hasn't said anything about her condition.” The woman took a delicate bite of her eggs, “if you ask me. I think he's got nothing to go on and is just fishing for clues.”

Stevie felt her blood pressure rise at the insinuation that Hopper wasn't doing his best to catch Miss Walden's attacker. These tourists had no idea the kind of stress the Chief of Hawkins Police was under. From this incident to the demogorgan to Hawkins Lab; it was a lot on one man's plate. Stevie didn't understand how Hopper could do it, although now that Billy knew, it made things easier for the older man.

"Huh. Yeah, maybe. But it doesn't explain why he had his guard dog on high alert at the crime scene." He flung his arms wide, nearly knocking the coffee pot out of her hands. "Just speculating here, but I think they found something and are just keeping it a secret until the librarian hits it."

Stevie vaguely remembered Max saying Billy had been called out to the condominiums this morning. It set her teeth on edge when she realized how close she lived to the crime scene and if she remembered correctly, Miss Walden lived there; which means Billy hadn't been telling the complete truth when she and Max asked him. Stevie carefully moved onto the man's mug, who grumbled a *'thanks doll'* around a mouthful of bacon. Stevie tried not to shudder, only Billy was allowed her to call her that.

As she poured, Stevie couldn't help but try to wrap her mind around the idea that Miss Walden, the woman who had been working at the library since Stevie was a freshman in high school, was now a possible murder victim. It was just so bizarre. Miss Walden couldn't hurt a fly and without counting the strange infatuation she had for Billy and completely ignoring the short lived relationship with Hopper, then she had no one in her life. Stevie remembered having a short conversation with her, around mother's day, where she hinted at the rocky relationship between herself and her mother. So really, Miss Walden had always come across as lonely and quiet.

Pulled from her thoughts by the sound of outraged yelling, Stevie looked down at the table to the sight of the man's mug being overfilled. The coffee was quickly making its way over the rim and splashing like a cracked dam until it slid its way across the smooth table surface and onto the angry reporters lap. Stevie couldn't even pretend to be sincere when she started to apologize. Without looking at the two, Stevie started to wipe up the mess. It seemed like the

conversation had come to an end due to the impromptu coffee shower; with another apology, Stevie turned to the next table.

April 8, 1988

1:32 pm

Billy figured it was okay for Max to miss at least one day of school. It was her senior year and Billy had missed far more than Max ever could. Last night also set Billy on edge and he wanted Max in his sights at all times, so he figured it couldn't hurt to give her a long weekend. Billy figured they both deserved it since he got a feeling this case wasn't going to be as cut and dry as the usual. Which brought him to the phone conversation he just had with Hopper.

He almost didn't want to believe the Chief. The idea that someone could intentionally hurt another human being like *that*. It was almost unbelievable. *Almost*. The hard truth of it was, Billy could see someone hurting another like that. It wasn't that far of a stretch to think that someone could move on from stealing to murder, especially if murdering meant a heavier pay out.

Billy was immensely grateful when his radio went off, at first he thought it was Flo, but when he heard Stevie's voice come through the other end he couldn't help but snort. They were two twenty-two year olds using a radio that five teens used to communicate. It was pretty pathetic and yet Billy wouldn't change it for the world.

"What is it sweetheart?" He finally asked, shifting in his seat and making the leather of the cruiser squeak in protest.

There was static for a few moments, making Billy's skin itch before her sweet voice broke it. "You're supposed to say 'over' when you're done talking. Over." Billy glared down at the radio as if it had personally offended him.

"What are we twelve?" He snapped. Billy waited and waited,

eventually realizing that Stevie wasn't going to reply back until he said it. " *Over*, " he snarled, already imagining the slightly feral grin that was most likely adoring the brunet's face.

"Thank you. Can we meet? Tonight? *Over*," Billy debated her question for all of two seconds before quickly agreeing. He couldn't help, but think of all the times they '*met up*' before in high school and part of him hoped it would be the same kind of meet up. Either way, it looked like he had a date with the most eligible bachelorette.

April 8, 1988

7:06 pm

The sun was just starting to set. And as always the sky was a masterpiece of colors all blending together to form the perfect painting. There was daffodil yellow melting into periwinkle pink and baby blue softly transitioning into the deep royal purple before the sun-orange would come to swallow it all whole, making way for twinkling stars and midnight blue. Stevie had read once that the colors seen during a sunset actually came from pollution. It was almost disquieting to learn that something so beautiful could be created by something so ugly.

Stevie was early, which was why she found herself outside of her car and leaning against the front of the beemer. It was cold enough Stevie was able to wear a light beige cardigan over her deep green diner regulated button down, paired off with her high waist jeans and tennis shoes. Her work shirt was a short-sleeve so Stevie was glad she had forgotten to take her cardigan out of the car or else she wouldn't have been able to handle the slight breeze that came up from the quarry.

As she kicked a stray pebble, Stevie became aware of the distant sound of tires treading through gravel. She fixed herself up as best as she could without a mirror and with grease stains adorning her shirt

before calling it a lost cause. It was never like Billy to care what she looked like and she doubted he'd start now. Trying to maintain an air of nonchalance and act like she hadn't just been trying to clean herself up, Stevie watched Billy make his way up the slight incline before pulling in next to her car. He didn't bother leaving it running and instead turned the cruiser off, along with the lights. Leaving the sunset as their only source of light, Stevie's brain couldn't help but notice that Billy's hair was shining a brilliant golden brown as he made his way towards her. She also noticed that he was wearing his police uniform. Licking her lips, Stevie turned her gaze back to the sunset. It really was beautiful.

"What's up princess?" Billy asked after a time of them sitting in silence, just watching the sun sink lower and lower into the sky. She didn't have to turn to know he was looking at her.

"The sunsets are always so pretty in the spring," she murmured. "Nothing like the winter. Those are always so...cold." She couldn't tear her eyes away as a bit of violent red started to reveal itself in between the pastel colors. She wondered if that was how Marissa's blood looked.

Billy scooted closer to her, knocking Stevie out of her reveries as his hand came to rest between her shoulders. "What are you on about Harrington? I thought you wanted to talk." The way he said *'talk'* suggested something entirely different and Stevie couldn't contain the incredulous look.

"Is it true?" She demanded, pulling away from Billy's warm hand. It left a cold spot on her back, making Stevie miss the contact.

"Is what true?" He asked, the playful tone dropping and a hard look that Stevie hadn't seen since high school graduation crossing over his face.

"Is it true Marissa got shot?" Billy stiffened and seemed to be debating on whether or not to say yes or no, " *Billy* . I deserve to know. I live less than seven hundred feet of her home!" She was shouting at this point and had moved from her leaning position against the beemer to standing directly across from Billy, her arm outstretched between them.

Billy didn't move from his position, arms crossed against a broad chest and one leg planted while the other lay folded at the ankle. He waited until Stevie stopped yelling before reaching out and taking hold of her hand. With a gentle tug, Stevie allowed herself to be pulled between Billy's now spread knees.

"Okay. Okay. Yes Miss Walden was shot, but there's no way to know if they'll strike again," Billy breathed, pressing his face against Stevie's collarbone.

Stevie's heart lurched, *'they'll?'* "What do you mean *they'll* strike again," she demanded, half wanting to pull away, but the other part of her wanted to snuggle closer. Wanted to feel protected. Cared for.

Billy didn't answer right away, instead turning to look over Stevie's shoulder at the sunset that cast them in a yellow and pink hue. She didn't push, not yet at least. The way he looked was something she hadn't seen since they were graduating, when she turned him down. He looked- thoughtful and pensive- like he knew it was all coming to an end and he couldn't keep the dam from breaking.

With a heavy sigh and roll of his eyes, Billy turned back to face her. It brought their faces closer together, mingling their breaths. "It's just a hunch me and Hop have. It's not definitive so don't hold me to it. And Miss Walden was shot, but she's still alive."

Stevie nodded to herself, finally allowing that minute fear that had been swelling inside since the diner to fade away. "Alright," with a deep breath, as if she was whispering a confession, "I trust you Hargrove."

She gave a light tap to his shoulder before pushing off and going to back to leaning next to him. For a while neither of them spoke, instead Stevie was happy to let the crickets and peepers fill the silence that had settled between them. It was peaceful and allowed her to gather the jumbled and half panic thoughts that had plagued her all day. Eventually Billy broke the quiet.

"Was that the only reason you called me out here?" Stevie gave him a confused look, but suddenly realized how Billy might've perceived her request for them to meet. In that moment, as she looked

anywhere but at his face, Stevie remembered all the good and bad times they had here at the quarry. The last time they had been here was the day of their graduation. It hadn't been a pleasant visit and yet, four years later, here they were.

Trying to save face, Stevie stood up once again, "yeah. That was it Hargrove. I'll see you at the diner tomorrow." Billy snatched her arm as she went to pass him, a strange look marring his face.

"Are you serious right now?" If Stevie didn't know better she would've assumed he was pissed. But she knew from the glint in his eyes, that it was confusion being covered up by a farce of anger. Four years had changed Billy from an angry teenager, who liked to skip school and smoke to a workaholic, who hadn't touched a cigarette since Stevie left him standing at the top of the quarry and never laid a finger on alcohol. Stevie didn't have to be a genius to know the reason behind the liquor.

Her sigh turned into a barely-there smile, "what do you want me to say?" *'I love you. What happened to us? I wish we could go back to the way we were.'* Stevie kept all of this to herself. It had been four years and while Billy may have changed, she doubted his sexual prowess had.

"I want you to stay and I want us to talk," he said with an air of confidence, gripping Stevie's hips with a firm hold. As if afraid she would pull away; Stevie had no intentions of doing that.

"Okay," she said with a fond eye roll. "What do you want to talk about?"

Billy's grip on her hips marginally relaxed, allowing the tension in Stevie's shoulders to loosen. She hadn't even noticed the knots of anxiety and stress in her back until Billy calmed down. "Us." He said with a definitive air, Stevie felt her anxiety rise and the tension return to her shoulder blades.

She pulled away from him, her heart pounding. "What-" she couldn't finish the thought, a strange look had crossed Billy's face when she pulled away, a look she couldn't name and didn't really want to. She didn't *want* to have this conversation. Not now. Not ever. Stevie

glanced around, hoping there would be something to distract them, hell she'd take a demogorgan any day over this. With nothing coming to distract them, Stevie finally turned back to Billy. "There isn't any us Billy. There hasn't been since four years ago."

The air seemed to go out of Billy's sails, his gaze went hard and his lips started to purse. With a heavy sigh, Stevie started to move towards the driver's side door. She figured their conversation was over, but just as she was about to open the door Billy spoke up.

"Go out with me." She whipped around to look at him, but Billy hadn't even moved, his gaze was still fixed on the sunset. His shoulders were drawn up around his ears, as if he was worried she would reject him.

Stevie leaned backward, her hand still on the door handle before pulling away to go back to where he sat. "Okay," she answered once she stood directly across from him. For a moment Billy continued to look down at where their shoes were inches apart, she was afraid he hadn't heard her. But then Billy slowly looked up, a cheshire grin stretched across his usually smug face. Stevie rolled her eyes and gave his shoulder a light smack. "Call me when you have a day alright." She tapped his shoulder again, "I need to go and pick up Dustin and Will from their science club. So let me know when it's a good day." With that she turned away.

"No goodbye kiss?" Billy called after her, moving out of the way of the car. Stevie rolled her eyes, making sure he could see the action in her rear view mirror before heading towards the high school.

4. Chapter 4



"It is the courage, the insistence, the ruthless force of youth."
— Agatha Christie

Hawkins, Indiana

April 14, 1988

8:57 am

There was an untouched coffee sitting on Jim's desk. He didn't remember making it and thought perhaps Flo had. Either way, it had gone cold and stale for however long he'd been sitting in his office. He couldn't believe it, *didn't* want to believe it. But the hard truth of it was- she was gone and so was their number one witness and only lead.

The funeral wouldn't be until Saturday and while he was sure Marissa's grandmother wouldn't want him there, Jim was going. Not only as the chief of police, but as a friend. Because Jim was a friend way before he went on one ill-fated date with her. He was also hoping that their killer would go to the wake and funeral, Jim knew it was a long shot, but he could only hope. Without Marissa and with how long the warrant for the video cameras were taking, Jim and his boys were losing ground on their killer.

Jim could see it on their faces, in the crevices around their eyes. Callahan, who was the second youngest in their little police force, looked as if he had aged five years; his hair was collecting more grays and there was an ever present *look* in his eyes. Powell was no better, the murder had really messed him up when he found out how close it was to his house. How close it was to his wife and kid. From the looks of it, Powell hadn't been sleeping and Jim was getting the fallout for that when his wife called every other day asking after him. Jim couldn't put up much of a fuss when Joyce was doing the exact same thing when he got home. It helped when Will would show him a new album or Jane would just sit out back with him not saying anything until dinner was ready.

Then there was Hargrove, who looked like the devil himself was chasing him. There was this hunted look in his eyes that had been there since the murder had been called in. He hated to think about it, but Jim couldn't help but notice how stiff the kid had got at the sight of Marissa's blood splattered across the wall like a Picasso painting, with the brain matter as a centerpiece. He hadn't seen that lost, *hopeless* look since Billy admitted to the abuse his bastard of a father inflicted on him.

To sum it up, they were all feeling the pressure of the case. Terrified it was going to happen again and frustrated for not knowing why someone would target Marissa, Jim was at a loss. He figured the best

course of action was to go and face Marissa's grandmother. He couldn't put it off forever and today seemed like the best day, if any, to do it. Groaning, Jim stood from his chair, his back cracking and scooped his mug up before heading to the door.

"Hargrove!" He called, not bothering to lower his voice. It caused the sleeping Callahan to snort himself awake and Hargrove, who was sitting behind his desk, to sit up straight. Jim turned his back to pour the mug out, but not before he saw Hargrove give him an impressive glare that could've set a dried out tree on fire.

"What?" Billy drawled, pushing a pencil back from the edge of his desk. Jim gave him *the look* from over his shoulder and did so until Billy sighed heavily and growled out, "what *chief?* "

Jim rolled his eyes as he turned back to finish rinsing out his mug while also wondering how someone could put so much disdain and disrespect into one word. "Finish up whatever you're doing and then we're heading out to the morgue." That got Hargrove's *and* Callahan's attention, the two shared a look before Hargrove turned his incredulous gaze back to Jim. He placed the now clean mug onto the counter and answered the unasked question, "we need to talk to Ms. Walden before we go any further and before the funeral."

From the corner of his eye, Jim saw Hargrove stiffen and seemed to have a hard time reigning himself in. Which was strange since the kid was one of the toughest sons of bitches that Jim knew. It seemed the case was getting to even the iron stomachs, he tried not to think of the reason.

Finally finding his stomach, Billy nodded and started gathering his things. At the same time, Jim made his way to the door, grabbing his trusty hat and hesitating on his coat. The weather forecast was said to be rainy, but so far the sky was a cloudy grey, as if it was waiting for the perfect moment to crack and release a never ending stream of water. Jim just hoped the clouds would hold out until after he and Hargrove were in the Jeep and on their way to talk to Ms. Walden.

9:21 am

Billy hated the morgue. The smell of disinfectant and ammonia reminded him of hospitals, which brought a whole new set of memories. He tried not to think of those because that just led him down a path of self-hatred and morbid thoughts of his mom. When they stepped into the building, Billy was ready to turn around and head to the closest bar to relieve his stress even though his therapist said that wasn't a good way to cope.

Instead, like his doctor taught him, he started to think of something else as Hopper and he made their way toward the morgue section itself. Of course his thoughts drifted towards a certain brunette with big brown doe eyes and legs a mile long. *Stevie*. She was something and had only become more beautiful since high school, a little softer since she stopped playing volleyball daily, even though he was fairly positive she was playing in a recreational league. He suddenly got the urge to go and watch one of her games and maybe, if she allowed it, take her out to dinner properly this time.

Jesus. He was hopeless.

"Hello Katherine," Hopper was saying, pulling Billy from his thoughts and making him fumble for his pad and pen. The woman in front of him looked like an older, spitting image of Marissa; including the big round owl glasses. Her brown hair was mingled with greys, which was surprising since woman her age would usually start to dye their hair, she also had crows feet so Billy could see that this woman was used to laughing. But when she turned to greet them, Billy almost took a step back. The look in her eyes could rival his own glare; it looked like a wolf about to eat her prey whole.

"Chief Hopper," the words dripped with acid and Billy couldn't help superstitiously glancing over towards Hopper to make sure he hadn't spontaneously combusted. He hadn't, but it was a close call.

"I just need to ask a few questions and then me and my deputy will get out of your hair." Jim said calmly, gesturing at Billy before turning back to Katherine, as if afraid turning his back for too long

will end with him getting a scalpel between the shoulders. Billy was slightly afraid to turn around himself.

Katherine seemed to think about this before nodding, she moved away from the door that she had been standing in front of, allowing Billy to see the words *Morgue Director* before gesturing them to follow her. They made their way to a side exit, where she propped the door open with a rock before pulling out a pack of cigarettes. She pulled one out for herself before offering it to Hopper, who accepted, then Billy, who shook his head.

“Your loss kid,” she tucked the pack back into her purse. “What is you want Chief?” Billy glanced over at him, wondering the same thing. If he remembered correctly, Callahan and Powell already took Katherine’s statement, so the question was ‘*why the hell were they here?*’

Hopper took his hat off, running his fingers through his receding hair before covering it all up again. “I hate to ask you this. Especially right now, but did Marissa have any enemies? People who she may have had a disagreement with or a falling out?”

Katherine pressed the cigarette to her lips, her fingers shaking minutely. “No. She was a good girl and before you ask no. Marissa wasn’t into any drugs or anything unseemly. I raised her to be better than all those walking disasters.” Billy tried not to flinch when her iridescent eyes panned over to him as she said *walking disasters*. He knew his past acts weren’t great and to have this woman hint at it so callously caused Billy’s heart to beat faster and sweat to build at the back of his neck. To avoid eye contact he quickly wrote what she had said, ignoring Hopper’s barely concealed sympathetic glance.

“I just have to ask,” Hopper said gently, “was she seeing anyone? A boyfriend or...” Katherine scoffed and Billy had the sudden feeling that they had just walked into something they should have left well enough alone.

“Seeing anyone?” She laughed, blowing smoke into their faces, “last person she saw left after one date and never returned any of her calls.” Out of the corner of his eye, Billy saw Hopper wince and flush. Billy didn’t think he had ever seen Hopper look so flustered and it

made him grin.

“Yeah- well,” Hopper cleared his throat, glancing over Billy’s shoulder, probably to make sure he was getting everything down and not because his ex’s mom was ripping him a new one. “We just need to clear all our bases.” Yeah, definitely the former.

“Of course,” she said, sucking in one last breath of cigarette smoke before blowing it out of the corner of her mouth and dropping the bud. “If that’s all, I have my granddaughters funeral to plan,” she turned to go, but not before turning around and parting with, “I’ll see you at the funeral chief. Deputy.” With that, she turned and disappeared back into the building.

“Well that was useless,” Hargrove grumbled, tucking his pad and pen away. Jim rolled his eyes, but silently agreed, he had been hoping that Katherine would shed some suspect from the shadows for them, but he knew he had been reaching with her. He only hoped the security video would show them *something* , if not, then Jim feared they would have another murder on their hands.

“Let’s go. I wanna see if Powell’s made progress with the warrant.” He snuffed out his cigarette before kicking the rock out from under the door. He didn’t wait for Hargrove and knew the kid was having to dodge the now closing door before it locked him out. Served him right for laughing about his situation with Marissa, the little shit.

April 16, 1988

12:00 pm

Stevie loved her kids, but when she had to get up early on her day off

for them, that was where she drew the line. But today was different, today she was watching the party after a funeral and wasn't that something? She never thought she'd be going to a funeral so soon after Will's fake one. She figured the next one would be for a relative who passed from old age, not because the town's only librarian had been *murdered* .

Sighing, Stevie fixed the simple black dress she was wearing, the lace on the short sleeves and what made up the sweetheart neckline were causing her to itch and she selfishly hoped she didn't have to wear the dress for long. With another sigh leaving her lips, she turned away from the car's rear view mirror and made her way up the steps of the Henderson residents, knocking once and making her way inside. It was utter chaos.

Dustin was yelling at the cat they had found to replace Mews, while Mrs. Henderson was fretting over his tie. Stevie could see Will and Lucas in the kitchen, where Lucas was finishing up Will's own tie while also quietly talking to him. She decided to take her chances with the two teenagers then trying to get in between Dustin and his complaints.

"You guys almost ready to go?" She called over Dustin's curses, making her way around the living room to stand beside Lucas, who took a step back from his handy work. She clapped him on the back for a job well done and shared a grin with Will, "looking good Byers."

"Yeah, we're just about ready," Lucas said, straightening his cuffs like a James Bond villain. Stevie struggled to repress a laugh.

Will nodded along, adding as an afterthought, "Mike's meeting us there. He said he was going with Nancy and Jonathan. Mom and Da-Jim are going in the police cruiser with Jane." Stevie ignored the slight slip with Hopper's name and nodded as he spoke.

"Max is going with Billy," Dustin chimed in from the living room, his curling hair falling out of its stylized place due to the heat. Mrs. Henderson squawked in outrage when she noticed all her hard work falling to nothing.

Her heart jumped at Billy's name, she tried not to think of why and

instead focused on fixing Will's hair. "Oh? Well, I guess the whole parties going. And-" she raised her voice to be heard over Dustin's laughter, " *and* we better get going or we're going to be late."

That got everyone's attention, causing Dustin to release a noise that resembled a pig and Lucas to huff from his place where he was admiring himself in the windows reflection. Will just nodded sagely and made for the door; she rolled her eyes at her boys and followed after him.

1:00 pm

The funeral was beautiful, in a sad sort of way. They were at the only church in Hawkins and Ms. Walden had made the rundown, paint chipped building look brand new. The pews had been dusted, the floors shined and the carpet that rolled down the center aisle had been washed and cleaned. Stevie hardly recognized the place her parents used to take her to every Sunday. Even the windows had been repainted and a fresh set of lilies hung from a basket at the end of every pew.

Stevie sat in the third row back from where the coffin lay at the front and sat directly in between Hopper, the Byers and the Wheeler's. Even Nancy and Jonathan had decided that it would be more appropriate if they sat with their respective families, at least until the service was over. Billy and Max were directly in front of them, Billy's arm lay across the back of the pew so it was behind Max and in front of Stevie.

Max looked so mature in her black and emerald green dress, the colors making her hair look especially fiery instead of the usual orange and yellows that washed out her face. Billy was dressed in a deep maroon button up and surprisingly the buttons were all closed except the top two. On closer inspection, Stevie realized that he was wearing the same shirt he had worn *that night* at the Byers. No wonder it looked like it was ten seconds away from being torn if he

tried to take a deep breath, Billy had bulked up in the four years since high school and matured beyond that too.

As the priest spoke about Marissa and the short, yet beautiful life she had, Stevie couldn't keep her eyes off Billy's arm. And maybe that was wrong since they're at a *funeral* , but it wasn't her fault when he dressed like *that* in a holy place. It should be illegal and maybe she'll talk to Hopper about making that happen because dear lord Billy could give someone a heart attack.

She was nudged out of her thoughts by Dustin, who sat next to her when he realized she would be stuck next to her ex and his new girlfriend. Not that she and Jonathan had a bad break up, it had been mutual and they had both seen the end coming, what with him and Nancy disappearing and her and Billy's weird flirting going on. They both had come to the same conclusion that it was best if they just stayed friends and left it at that.

"Look," Dustin whispered. Although, he was doing his Dustin whispering, where he thinks he is, but everyone can hear him anyways, so she quickly shushed him and followed his finger to the two boys that sat diagonally across the aisle from them. Her eyes narrowed when she realized who it was he was pointing at. Troy and James, the two kids who had put a knife against Dustin's neck and told Mike to jump. Last she had heard they had left after that little incident. She didn't know they were back and couldn't figure out why when she vaguely recalled Troy's mother being close friends with Marissa.

Suddenly, she leaned forward and peered over the Byers and Jane to look at Hopper. She tapped Joyce to get his attention and waited until he was looking over at her before subtly nodding towards where the boys and their parents sat. He followed her gaze and must have come to the same conclusion because he nodded. Stevie relaxed back against the hard bench before going back to daydreaming about Billy's arms.

Jim could almost kiss Stevie for pointing those two trouble makers out. He didn't care about them necessarily, he just wanted to talk with Troy's mother, Martha. He knew for a fact that Marissa and her were friends, if not best friends. She'd know things that Marissa wouldn't tell her grandmother. Private things, such as a boyfriend or love interest.

He waited until after the procession and the walk to the cemetery that sat behind the church before grabbing Hargrove by the scruff of his shirt, interrupting his flirting with Stevie and dragging him over to where the teens and their parents were.

"Mrs. Iaconna," he said warmly, gaining her attention and the attention of her son. A strange look crossed his face, but Jim chalked it up to seeing the same guy who told him girls with powers don't exist and to just "*rub some dirt in it*" so yeah, he figured he was due a little caution.

"Chief Hopper." Martha coldly regarded him, it seemed *she* hadn't forgotten. Jim could work with that, hopefully.

"I just have a question to ask about Marissa," she scoffed and started ushering Troy and her husband towards the parking lot. A feeling of urgency overcame him and Hargrove, who had always been more susceptible to people's emotions, moved to block their path. "Please Martha. I just need to know whether she was seeing anyone or had any problems.

She stopped in her tracks, her arm wrapped protectively around Troy's shoulders. "Do you have any sense of timing?" She demanded, sending a sharp glare over her shoulder before sighing and releasing the tension in her shoulders. "No. Marissa wasn't seeing anyone, but-but she was having some trouble with a guy." Martha pulled Troy a little closer, who looked five seconds away from ripping himself out of her grasp if she so much as squeezed him. "A neighbor, if I remember correctly. She was telling me about it when I was helping her with some new furniture. I never caught a name, sorry."

If Jim was a man prone towards bursts of emotions he would've been fist pumping the air. Instead he shared a glance with Hargrove before reaching out and squeezing her arm gently. "Thank you. You have no

idea how much help you've just given me.”

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

So, I'm currently having some technical difficulties with my laptop and I hope *fingers crossed* that'll I'll be able to post next week as scheduled. If not, I'll let you guys know over on my tumblr, but as of right now- with the help of my sister letting me borrow her laptop- I'll be posting next Friday. I'll also be on vacation, so it may not come as early as you guys are used to.

Jim loved coming into work with a plan instead of the constant nag of worry that had been following him since the start of the investigation. He'd finally got the news he'd been waiting for since the murder and with that came a shudder of relief, he felt as if some great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. They *finally* had the surveillance cameras tape from the night of the break in, Jim could practically see the finish line and he couldn't wait to catch the son of bitch. And now, with Martha's impromptu question, they finally had a lead. Which Jim was going to have Callahan and Powell do when they got in.

Now he just needed to go pull Hargrove in so they could go together. And wasn't that weird? Him and Hargrove working together when not so long ago Jim had been bringing the kid in for disorderly conduct, underage drinking, *fighting* . The works. And then, right before graduation, the kid had suddenly taken an one-eighty. His attitude changed, his driving was impeccable and he stood up to his piece of shit father before taking custody of his kid sister. And that was all before Hargrove came up to him asking about a spot on the force. Jim would never tell the kid, but that day he felt like a proud father.

It was almost strange that Hargrove had stayed inside the very house that he had been tormented in, but then, Jim figured that he was just that type of person. The past was the past and there was nothing he or anyone could do to fix it, so why not make the future better? If not for himself, but for Max and *Jesus* has the kid made Max happier than a pig in shit. She got *everything* she ever wanted, a home, a family, a *brother*. And even though Susanne had lost custody of Max, Hargrove was lenient in letting the two go shopping and having weekends and sometimes weekdays together. Jim sometimes wondered how Neil hadn't been able to beat all the kindness out of Hargrove and for a while Jim thought he *had* taken everything good in the teen and twisted it into an ugly mass of hatred and suppressed fear.

But as he sat at their kitchen table watching as Hargrove made some toast and Max raced around the livingroom yelling about a shoe, he knew Neil had lost another battle. He knew the Hargrove-Mayfield family were made of sterner stuff.

"Hey you want some toast?" Hargrove threw a glance over his

shoulder from where he stood slightly leaning against the fridge. His eyes never really leaving the toaster to see whether Jim had said no or yes.

“Ah. No, that's okay. I'm good,” Jim decided after a three second internal debate. He *was* hungry, but they really should be going. Hargrove snorted from his corner and once the toast popped, slapped it onto a paper plate and slid it across the rickety table so it landed in front of Jim. He almost wanted to ask how long it took him and Max to practice that.

“Eat up chief.” Jim opened his mouth to protest, but the words died on his tongue at the look on Hargrove's face.

Max popped her head in the archway, interrupting their staring contest, “since my dear brother won't say it, I will. You need to eat Hop ‘cause this case won't be solved with you passing out from hunger.” Jim was about to deny that aggressively, when she dismissed him just as quickly as she appeared. “Billy can I take the camaro? I promise to have it back for your date.”

To avoid the oncoming argument, Jim started to eat his toast. He could see from the corner of his eye Hargrove dropping another slice of toast into the toaster and pouring himself some orange juice.

He turned around to face Max, his hands planted on the counter behind him, “you better have her back before six.” Max grinned and raced towards the key holder hanging by the door, “not a scratch Maxine!” Billy yelled over the sound of the door closing with a bang.

Before Hargrove could turn to face him, Jim asked, “date? With who?” If he wasn't paying close attention, Jim would've missed the light blush that suddenly dusted Hargrove's tan cheeks.

“Uh-” he floundered, his gaze seeming to search the air for the words. “Yeah,” he sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck, Jim never realized the kid *could* be sheepish. “It's with- uh. With Stevie.”

Jim didn't need a mirror to know the incredulous look that had most likely crossed his own face. Especially when Hargrove's face turned an even deeper shade of scarlet. Jim once again felt a feeling similar

to pride wash through him. The kid, well he wasn't much of a kid anymore, that stood before him was like an entirely different person. And yet, he was exactly the same.

10:42 am

After a coffee stop at the diner and an impromptu flirting session between him and Stevie; they finally made it back to the office. Billy could feel the anticipation coming off of Hopper and he knew the chief had been getting reamed a new one by the journalists and family ever since Marissa's death. Not to mention the town as a whole.

So, when they got the call that the warrant had gone through- well Billy now understood the term *Christmas came early*. He'd never seen a grown man get so excited, except that one time Neil beat him so hard he ended up in the hospital. The joy had only lasted so long afterwards before the feds showed up and started asking around.

While that had been a shitty time and the reason they booked it out of California, Billy still considered it the best gift Neil could have ever given him. If he hadn't done what he had then Billy never would've met Stevie and everything that followed. His heart always felt too seconds away from jumping out of his chest when he thought about the *what if*.

The possibility that they never would've met. The idea that he never would've known what it meant to be cared for and to care for someone in return. And the relationship he and Max had worked *so hard for* never coming into fruition. All the possibilities just sent him into a frenzy whenever they crossed his mind, especially four years ago. When he almost lost *everything*.

"Hargrove? *Hargrove*. Jesus kid," Jim growled, tearing Billy from his inner turmoil and making a flush appear and then the usual Hargrove scowl following. "There you are. I thought I was gonna have to call an ambulance or worse *Stevie*."

That got his attention, “*don't you dare.*” Billy snarled at the words, practically foaming at the mouth, he was sure. Jim raised an unimpressed eyebrow and grinned with shark teeth.

“C'mon,” Jim hopped out of the Jeep and *skipped* his way into the police building. Billy wished he could bleach the sight from his memories. “Let's go Hargrove! I've been waiting two weeks for this!”

Billy scampered after him and barely caught the door with his fingertips. Glaring, Billy silently promised to shut the door in *his* face the next time they walked into a building together.

12:33 pm

“Okay. Sure I had a disagreement with Marissa, but who didn't?” Phil raised an eyebrow at Earl's words and glanced over at Powell. He seemed just as confused as him.

“I'm sorry. What?” Powell leaned forward from his place on Earl's couch, his elbows perched precariously on his knees. Earl seemed just as confused, but his confusion stemmed from their confusion and not by the situation.

“You guys didn't know?” When they shook their heads, Earl laughed, “Marissa's- sorry. Marissa was a total bitch to the other residents. I mean- you couldn't even cough without her complaining about it.” In his tirade Earl stood up from his seat and stormed over to the window that looked out over the street.

Phil quickly wrote down Earl's statement and gave Powell a nod to continue. He always was better at asking questions than Phil was. “Where were you the night of April seventh? Around 9:30 pm?” The question made Earl stiffen, his gaze turning owlsh and his face went *white* . As if he thought this had been a little get together instead of the interrogation it was.

“I- I was here. At home,” he looked back over at them, his gaze imploring. *Pleading* with them to believe him. Callahan had to brush aside their friendship so he could focus on their job. They *needed* to

find Marissa's murderer and while he hated to think of arresting a friend- he would. He'd do his job. "Wait-" Earl yelped as Powell stood up. He didn't seem to realize that Powell was just stretching his legs and seemed to take the movement as a threat. "Wait. I saw- I saw two guys leaving from the direction of Marissa's."

Phil stiffened in his corner on the couch, his gaze snapping to meet Powell's. No one had said anything about two guys the last time they had been around the condominiums. "What two guys?" Phil demanded, leaning forward and staring at Earl with an unflinching gaze.

"I don't know! I didn't catch their faces, but I saw them around that time, I swear." They quickly thanked Earl before heading to the squad car and while Powell drove, Phil radio'd to the office letting them know they were on their way back.

1:26 pm

Since Jim's office was the only place with a TV, they decided that it would be best to watch it there, away from prying eyes. He stood impatiently behind Flo, who sat in his chair, with Hargrove at his shoulder. His coffee was clenched in his fist and was about ten seconds away from exploding, when Hargrove scooped it out of his grasp and strategically placed it down at the corner of the desk. It also happened to be the farthest spot away from Jim's anxious grasp, which he was about to make a sarcastic comment on when Flo let out a silent '*ah.*'

His gaze snapped down to the TV and together they watched in transfixed silence as a perfect view of the Stuyvesant Street condominiums came into view. Glancing at the bottom of the screen, Jim could see the time read **4/7/88 5:50 P.M.**

For ten minutes nothing happened so Jim quickly took control and fast forward the tape until Hargrove pointed, "*there.*" The time read **6:17 P.M.**, with his heart in his throat Jim, Flo, and Hargrove watched as Marissa waltzed her way up to her door. She stopped for

a moment, glancing sharply towards what Jim knew to be the tree line and then quickly making her way inside. They waited another few moments until it became obvious nothing else was going to happen. Jim once again took over and started fast forwarding to the time right before the 911 call.

"What are you doing?" Flo asked, her hand shaking as she adjusted her reading glasses. Hargrove and he shared a knowing look.

"He's going to right before the call came in. The tape might have caught something. If-" Hargrove swallowed, "if you need to go-"

"No," Flo said with resolution, her gaze turning hard. "I want to catch the guy just as much as you two."

"Okay. Okay," Billy mumbled, fixing his gaze back to the screen. He laid his hand across the back of Flo's chair, his knuckles were completely white with tension.

Jim suddenly snapped a quick and sharp, "here we go." They watched in silence, the tension was palpable and Jim could *taste* the anticipation in the air. For a moment nothing happened and Jim was just about to call it quits when something on the screen caught his eye. Two figures were making their way from the direction of the forest, one was short and stout; the other was tall and average in height. Nothing discernable since the two suspects were wearing hoodies, gloves, and masks.

The two individuals cautiously made their way to Marissa's front door, hesitated, and then the shorter of the two knocked against the wood. The time stamp was **9:33 P.M.** and when no one answered the door, the suspects tried the handle, but Jim assumed they must have found it locked because one of them gestured at the side of the house and together the two slipped into the shadows.

Right before a half hour was up, Jim could see the two come back around the house and then leave facing the camera. Hargrove knocked his hand out of the way, grabbing the remote and slammed his thumb down on the tiny triangle button, freezing the image and showing one blurry face, half obscured by the scarf around their mouth.

“We got ‘em,” Flo breathed, a hand reaching towards her mouth, but stopping before it made contact. “Sort of,” she added on as an afterthought. Hargrove leaned back from his hanging perch over Flo’s shoulder and gave Jim an unreadable look, at least his shoulders had lost a little bit of that tension that had been thrumming through all of them.

Hargrove sighed and ran thick fingers through his hair, “we can’t ID them with this. The image is way too grainy, not to mention their faces are half covered.” Jim ignored the pointed look coming his way and focused on the frozen image of their suspects.

“Where’s Powell and Callahan?” Jim started to reach for the phone, his gaze never leaving the still-image. Hargrove stumbled his way through an excuse of how the two men were on their way back from questioning the neighbor before demanding what *he* was doing. “I’m calling in a favor,” he spared Hargrove a glance and turned his eyes meaningfully at the wall clock, Billy followed his gaze, the clock read 4:30, which was crazy when Jim thought about how long he, Flo and Hargrove had been staring at the VHS tapes. “This may take a while, so go get ready for your date.”

“But-” Jim immediately shut down any argument he may have had with a solid shake of his head and a disapproving frown that Jane called his dad glare.

“Go have fun Billy and for both our sakes. Go easy on the cologne.” Hargrove gave him a long suffering look that barely hid the pleased smile at the thought of Stevie. “Ugh. Get out of here! You’re stinking up my building with your hormones.”

Notes for the Chapter:

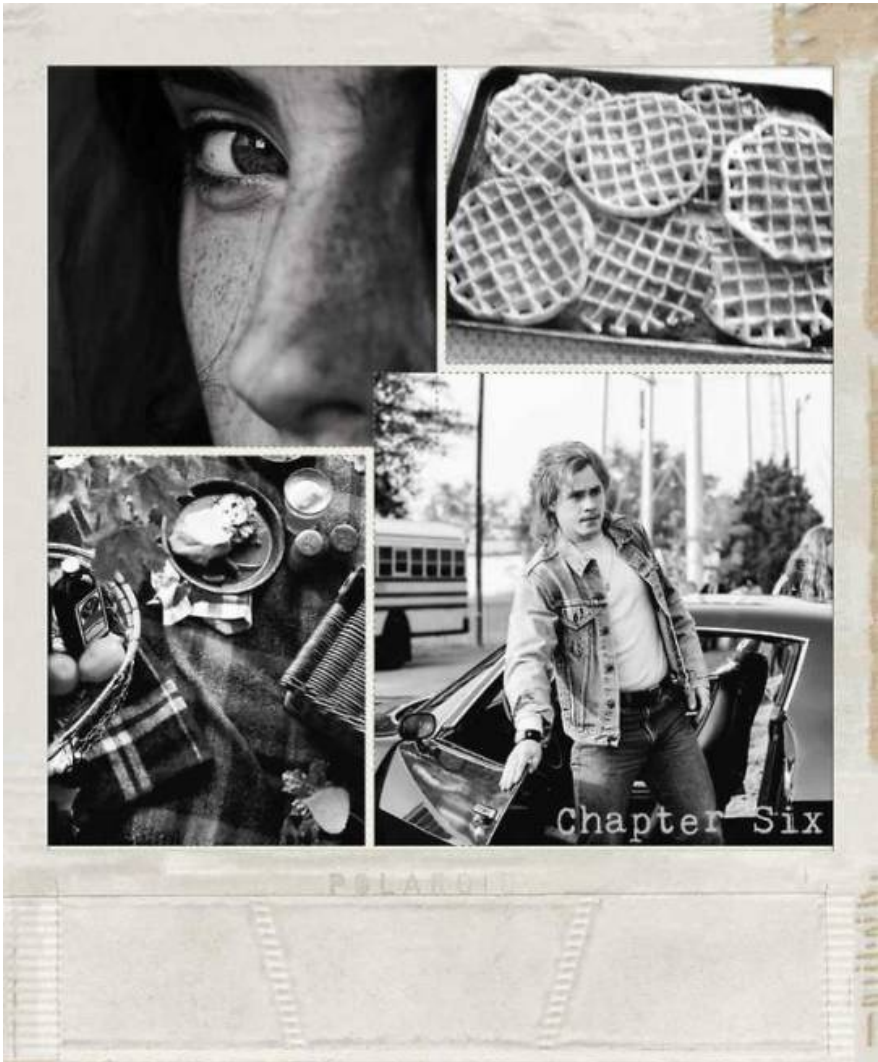
Sorry this is so short! I actually had to split this chapter into two and I felt like I needed to get the ball rolling with the murder suspects and all. Hopefully you guys enjoyed this chapter better than the last one!

Also, Earl and any side character I’ve used so far are actual people from the show. Here’s a link below that

shows who Earl is and if you want, browse at the other characters and comment if you want any one of them to appear! Except Bennie, Barb and Bob for obvious reasons.

[This is Earl](#)

6. Chapter 6



"You realize that our mistrust of the future makes it hard to give up the past."

- Chuck Palahniuk

Hawkins, Indiana

February 1, 1984

7:32 am

Stevie sat watching silently as Nancy mouthed the words to her college paper. She knew it was bad, could practically see it written across her face. "It's bad, isn't it?" She couldn't stand the silence and the sudden urge to just *drive* was starting to look better and better.

"No no. It just- you start off with your grandfather's war story and then bring it around to volleyball. What's the connection?" Nancy asked kindly, no sign of disgust or disappointment anywhere on her face.

While she didn't seem too concerned, Stevie's face was on fire. She suddenly felt incompetent and foolish, especially sitting next to Nancy, who had already sent out her college applications and essay. Stevie could never be as smart as Nancy, so she didn't understand why Nan was pushing the idea of college. If she couldn't even impress her *parents*, what made Nancy think she could do that with a top college. She'd be lucky to even be accepted into *community college* and everyone gets accepted into those.

"Well-" she licked her lips, "I guess because we both achieved something." She trailed off, her father's words rearing their ugly poison. *Useless*. She couldn't even compare her grandfather, a war hero, to herself- a useless, waste of space, with not even half a brain. "Forget it," she spat with righteous fury, ripping the essay from Nancy's dainty grasp and tearing the paper in half, until it was nothing but shreds.

"Hey, it doesn't suck." Nancy said, as if she could ever understand what it meant to be a disappointment. Stevie just nodded in hope's that it'd placate her, she had no illusions about *her* future.

As she opened her mouth to reassure Nancy, the sound of *Rock You Like a Hurricane* came blasting between the parked cars. Scorpions was coming from a blue camaro with a California license plate, she couldn't see the driver or passengers, but from the music choice she'd bet money he was a real tool. Stevie leaned forward so her chest was pressed tight against the steering wheel and her arms on top of it, she

kinda wanted to see the driver.

"Who's this asshole," Stevie wondered aloud, her words were barely out when the question was answered for them. A red head came stumbling out of the passenger side, a skateboard tucked under her arm and her middle finger up as she stormed away. After a moment a guy slowly came out from the car, he must've known he was the center of everyone's attention because he purposefully took his sweet time getting out.

Stevie's breath hitched, as she was sure every other girls did too. He was...douchy looking, but in a *'I know I'm hot shit so keep on looking'* kind of way. Stevie couldn't look away even if she wanted to and she didn't want to. Look away that is.

He had the bluest eyes she'd ever seen and while his hair left much to be desired, even that part didn't take away from his- *everything*. Blue eyes' hair was like a field of corn, except when he tilted his head just so, it then went to wheat brown. Still light enough to be considered blonde, but also raised the question, what color is his hair? Or better yet, what color does *he* consider it.

For a just a millisecond, as Stevie and Nancy stepped out of the beemer, she wished he'd look at *her* . And only her because Stevie could sense something inside the guy, something dangerous and dark. He was a mystery wrapped in an enigma and Stevie wanted to break down that wall and see what skeletons were in the guy's closet. But none of that happened, instead the guy slammed his car door shut and winked at a group of girls, who giggled and did the stereotypical hair flip and batting eyelashes. They just looked they had dust in their eyes, but that was Stevie's private opinion. But she did watch him walk and if she focused on his ass, well, Jonathan didn't need to know.

April 20, 1988

1:33 pm

Stevie couldn't remember the last time she had butterflies. Over a *guy* no less. Sure her heart started pounding a fierce tempo when she had faced off against the demodogs and of course she had felt a sick sense of vertigo when Billy had pulled up *that night*. But really, she never felt excitement for something like she did now. Not even when she was with Jonathon did she feel like she was about to lean too far over a cliff where there was no bottom.

Only, she wanted to see what was at the bottom. If only to know whether it had been worth it. She *hoped* it'd be worth it. Her thoughts dispersed like smoke when she heard banging on her front door and then the follow up of Dustin's voice hollering at her from the other side.

"C'mon Stevie," Dustin's screech could wake the dead, it was so high pitched. For her neighbors sake, Stevie quickly raced down the stairs and threw the door open with a hard stare.

"Don't you have school right now?" She demanded, not the least bit surprised when everyone else materialized behind him. Excluding Max and Lucas of course, who must've been on another date. It was sweet how devoted those two were and made Stevie think of the phrase *puppy love*, which she was sure Joyce used before in regards to Mike and Jane.

"Hi Stevie! How are you?" Dustin paused for dramatic effect, "me? Oh, well, I'm just dandy thanks for asking." Stevie rolled her eyes and opened the door wide enough for them to pass by.

"Ha. Ha. No one's used the word 'dandy' since the fifties so calm down *dandy man*." Stevie felt quiet proud of herself, even as the others rolled their eyes while Jane looked mildly confused. Clearly not confused enough to ask what that small interaction was between her and Dustin. Smart girl.

"We heard you have a date," Mike said easily moving past Dustin, heading towards the kitchen. "Nancy wouldn't shut up about it."

Dustin sent a scandalized look at the back of his head, "what? A

date? With *who?* ”

Stevie shook her head and quickly went into the kitchen to make sure no one was setting anything on fire *again* . “Nancy told you that? How did she even know?” Stevie hadn't spoken to Nancy since graduation, not for lack of trying on Nan's part. Stevie just hadn't been in an emotionally good part of her life, not to mention Nancy was going off to college while Stevie was still stuck and didn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon.

Mike fished out a box of eggos from the freezer, “she found out from Jonathon, who found out from Mrs. Byers, who was told by Hopper.” What Stevie got out of that, was how adorable Mike was for calling Joyce *Mrs. Byers* still even after four years and the hell they had all been through together. Stevie herself thought of Joyce as more of a mother than her actual mother.

“Save some for us you bozo,” Dustin screeched. He had to herd Will out of the way, pushing the poor kid into Stevie's stomach and making both of them stagger back against the wall that separated the kitchenette from the living room. Together, they watched as Mike and Dustin started arguing over the merits of whip cream on eggos versus chocolate syrup. Stevie was in favor of both and by the looks of Jane's face, she was too.

To stop the escalating debate from turning into a full blown fight, Stevie gently nudged Will away from the wall. “ *Guys* , I have both of those.” She reached into the cupboard above the toaster and tilted her head for Jane to reach into the fridge. “So stop acting like two first graders arguing over barbies and start toasting some more of those.”

After a long silent debate and an albeit, tense silence, the two finally seemed to come to an agreement and went their separate ways. Mike to watch Jane levitate the orange juice, chocolate milk and whip cream over to the tiny nook that made up the table. And Dustin over towards Will, who was setting the silverware and placemats down. Stevie didn't even realize she *had* placemats.

Once everyone was seated, with their own ideas of a perfect eggo, they started to eat. No one spoke and it was the kind of silence that

families usually developed. A comfortable air where no speaking was needed and everyone seemed to be content to eat with their own thoughts as company.

That is, of course, until Jane decided to break the silence by asking, "Stevie? Date?" That set Dustin off, who somehow managed to drag Mike in, while Will sat silently in the corner and Jane looked more confused than interested. Stevie *groaned*.

6:43 pm

When Billy had asked her out last night, they had decided that seven o'clock would be the best time. Of course, Stevie had serious anxiety so she decided the best course of action was to arrive at half past six. It wasn't her brightest idea and she definitely wasn't proud of it. But she was relieved to see Billy's camaro parked at the edge of the quarry, the man himself sitting on the roof of the car. She easily pulled alongside him, took a fortifying breath and quickly got out.

"You're here early," Billy commented, hopping down from his perch and going around to the driver's side to retrieve something.

She kicked her way up the camaro's hood, "I could say the same to you." He huffed a laugh and finally seemed to find what he'd been looking for. She peered in through the windshield, but couldn't seem to see what he was grabbing and eventually gave up to watch the sunset. She always felt like the day was the brightest during a sunset and maybe that said something about her because it was also the time where everything was just about to go dark.

She was shaken from her morbid thoughts when she was covered by a heavy cloth. With a small shriek, Stevie flailed her arms until she eventually was able to free her head from the blanket. Now that Stevie could actually see it, the blanket was a checkered black and red heavy duty piece of fabric. There were tears and pieces missing from the corners and it smelled like mothballs. Stevie loved it.

"It was my mom's," Billy took it from her lax grip and laid it gently in front of the fender. Stevie watched in muted silence as he procured a basket. Opening it, Billy revealed a variety of foods and an option of tonic, water or some beer. Stevie hopped down next to him and grabbed a water before fishing around for some utensils. Between some light-hearted banter, they managed to lay everything out so that the blanket was on the comfiest spot they could find- a patch of green and yellow grass- while the food was placed at the center of it- so they could sit next to each other, but not too close.

"Why'd you pick this place?" Stevie popped a grape into her mouth and tried to ignore the way Billy stared at her mouth. "Billy?"

He visibly shook his head, "I, uh. I feel like this is our spot. You know?" If Stevie didn't know better, she'd say Billy was *blushing*. "This is where we always meet and- fuck. I didn't think taking you to the diner was a great first date."

Stevie tried to imagine going to the place she worked for a date and shuddered at the thought. It wasn't like the food was bad or anything, the complete opposite in fact. But she worked there five days a week majority of the time and would rather not spend her days off there too.

"Thanks. I'm glad you picked here." She decided on, brushing a stray hair back behind her ear. Billy sent her a toothy smile that made his eyes crinkle and his nose scrunch up. *'God, he's adorable.'*

"It's been four years. How come you said yes now?" Billy asked, turning the tables against Stevie and making *her* blush. She had to think about it for a moment. Stevie had wanted to say yes back then so badly, but they both knew what he had been asking was a pipe dream. It was unattainable back then and even now. But she said yes because it was time to stop dancing around and she was ready, *both* of them were ready.

She took a tentative drink of her water, trying not to choke on it when Billy poked her in the side. "I guess," she wheezed, "it was inevitable. And I don't know about you, but I was tired of going in circles and wondering what if? I figured it wouldn't hurt to try and if it didn't work- well, we're both adults. It happens." She loosened her

death grip and had to consciously loosen the tense muscles in her back.

Through her little spiel Billy nodded along. He didn't seem angry or surprised at her words, just mildly accepting. Stevie briefly wondered if he had been having the same thoughts, but didn't bother asking since the conversation had already taken an awkward turn. It was almost comical how they both were socially awkward now that they weren't in high school anymore and had to put up with all the bullshit and drama of school.

"Well, I'm just glad you said yes," Billy spoke up, a mischievous gleam lighting up his eyes. "Or else I would've been stuck asking Flo out."

"You would've been out of luck amigo. She's a taken woman and besides," Stevie laughed, "she's way too good for you anyways."

"Oh? So what's that make you?" Chucking her half empty bottle at his head, Stevie let out an outraged noise.

8:00 pm

The diner would be closing soon and Jim was running out of patience. After he sent Billy home and politely asked Flo to give him the room, Jim had called in his favor. Of course, they weren't too happy to be bothered about a murder and had thought they were being accused of it until Jim explained why he was calling. Once everything was explained, they grudgingly agreed to help, if only to be left alone. So, Jim sat. Waiting and waiting. Until finally he appeared in a beat up chevy with a grimace on his face.

"Owens." Jim leaned back from his coffee and watched as the scientist made his way through the booths and tables until he stood over him. He looked worse for wear, which wasn't surprising, since Sam was now a professor at some big shot college in Chicago and had

avoided all things Hawkins and the upside down since the disaster with Will and Bob. Jim was lucky to even get the guy to agree to come into the diner.

“Chief,” he breathed, looking almost relieved as he sat down, like he had been worried this was all a hoax. Jim wished it was. “What do you need?” Jim thought about that, while he stirred his coffee and Sam declined a menu from the waitress. He was glad Billy and Stevie had pulled their heads out of their collective asses, especially since right now, Stevie not being here to stare suspiciously at both of them was a blessing. He didn’t need this getting back to Joyce or Will. Jane, he figured, was far more practical and would understand the necessity.

He swallowed his stale coffee and regarded Sam, “I need you to do whatever you have to to clear this tape up.” As he spoke, Jim casually slid the security tape across the table. The doctor leaned back as if it was a demodog in disguise, but after a heavy pause where Jim stared him down, Sam finally gave in and scooped it up.

“Why?” Jim tried not to roll his eyes and instead focused on looking outside at the cars passing by. Those people don’t even seem to realize or care that a woman died two weeks ago. And who knew, maybe in one of those cars a murderer was driving by.

“Marissa Walden, our librarian, was murdered in a break-in. I think we have our two guys in that tape, but the thing is-” he leaned into Sam’s space, “thing is I don’t have the tech to clear it up. So unless you want to be charged with obstruction of justice.” He waited a beat for it to sink in, “then I suggest you call some old friends of yours.”

Sam’s upper lip started to quiver and Jim could just make out the start of sweat around his hairline and temples, “even if I agree, this will take a month at the earliest. I mean-”

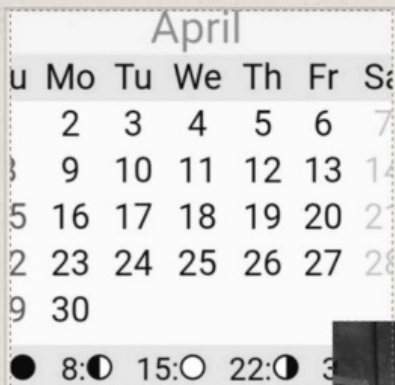
“I’m sure you can figure it out. Now,” Jim stood up, tucking his hat onto his head, “I’m missing dinner with my family. Get it done.”

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

As a heads up to anyone with a weak stomach or has an aversion to blood/gore or gun violence: *there is a dark part in this chapter! You have been warned.*

Now to carry on with the story! Enjoy!! I had a great Time writing this.



POLAROID

"Sometimes what you're looking for comes when you are not looking."

- Goodquote

Hawkins, Indiana

March 1, 1984

8:17 pm

"You should go with him," Nancy said softly, pushing some more Christmas lights out of the way. "He needs you."

"Does he?" Stevie snapped angrily, forcefully pushing *another* roll of lights down and out of her way. From the corner of her eye, Nancy froze before trying to act normal. Like she hadn't gone on a trip with Stevie's boyfriend and from the looks of that hickey on her neck, slept with him too. Stevie sighed, the anger going out of her just as suddenly as it appeared, "you go with him. He needs *you*." The '*not me*' went unspoken, but Nancy seemed to understand, if the pitying glances were anything to go by.

"Stevie," she reached out towards her, but Stevie wasn't having any of it. She didn't need or *want* sympathy from the very person she was ten seconds away from strangling with one of Joyce's lights. Besides, everyone that mattered knew Nancy and Jonathan had disappeared and then came back with what one would usually associate with the *honeymoon period* of a relationship. Stevie had been so pissed with Jon for not saying anything and it didn't help that she had been almost killed by a demodog. So yeah, she really didn't need Nancy's mother henning.

"Just go Nan," Stevie watched Jonathan's progress towards them, his eyes on Nancy. And only on her. "I think we both know that our relationship was over long before this," she was speaking to Nancy, but the words were meant for Jonathan's ears too. She didn't want any misunderstandings after tonight and he seemed to understand her meaning. They were done, *she* was done.

Nancy left without a word and followed Jonathan like a lost puppy. She probably didn't know what to do with herself now that Stevie rebuffed her offers of comfort. Stevie could only feel a sense of vindication at the thought and then she felt bad for even thinking that. Nancy had been her friend before this and she couldn't forget that, especially when they all needed to be working together.

May 3, 1988

12:57 pm

“So, you and Billy huh?” Stevie shoveled another mouthful of ice cream into her mouth, savoring the taste of cookies’n cream. And definitely not because she was avoiding the question. Nancy rolled her eyes and leaned over the table just in time to jab her spoon off its track to her mouth. Stevie watched sadly as the frozen milk fell to the linoleum floor, it practically blended in with the sterility of the store.

“What about me and Billy?” Stevie pointedly ignored the melting drop of ice cream and instead scooped another spoonful. Nancy gave a motherly sigh and delicately spooned her own strawberry sherbert, Stevie on the other hand started shoveling the ice cream as if she were a great white on shark week.

“Oh stop it,” Nancy pointed her plastic spoon threatenly at her. “Everyone’s talking about it and I had Jonathan practically screaming it in my ear before Cathy called me up.” Stevie shrugged her cardigan back over her work uniform from where it had slid down her arm and gave Nancy a look. Silently conveying through it, *‘why the hell should I care?’* Why would Jonathan even care? He should mind his damn business and Cathy had no right to be spreading rumors when she wasn’t even friends with her. “You know she’s had a crush on Billy since he got here.”

“Yeah? So, did everyone else in this town.” Stevie scooped another mound into her mouth, Nancy gave her an unimpressed look that reminded Stevie of her mom when she’d get angry at Stevie for wearing jeans instead of skirts. “Look, it’s no one’s business, but me and Billy’s,” she waved her utensil around, “I don’t know how Cathy or Jon found out, but it was just one date. I mean, it’s not like he proposed or anything.”

Stevie laughed nervously and when Nancy didn’t join in, it tapered off to an awkward cough. She glanced around, suddenly wishing for a demogorgan or a demodog to come attacking or god forbid. Miss Walden’s murderer to waltz in and admit to the crime. She’d take anything over the tense silence that had quickly developed between them. And it wasn’t even new, the silence. It had been there ever

since *that night*.

The night they broke it off and Stevie found out just how faithful Jonathan had been. And she wasn't mad about that. Not anymore, Stevie couldn't afford to be. She needed to be mature and prove not only to herself, but Nancy and Jonathan, that she could move past such juvenile antics.

She quickly finished her cup before asking, "how are you and Jonathan?"

Nancy stiffened. It seemed she wasn't as comfortable with the topic change as Stevie hoped. But she also didn't feel bad with bringing him up, not when Nan felt the need to bring Billy into their little reunion. Well, the 'reunion' looked like it was going to be ending sooner than expected, not that Stevie minded.

"Why don't you tell me," at Stevie's confused look, Nancy swiftly clarified. "You *are* going over to his house today. Aren't you?"

"How did you-" Stevie cut herself off, she knew before she even asked that Will must have told Jonathan, who probably told Nan. She wanted to be mad, but Stevie couldn't hold the anger for long when she thought about how close the two had become after Will went missing. The Byers didn't hide *anything* from each other and Stevie should've remembered that.

Nancy took pity on Stevie, as she easily picked up the conversation from before. Sort of. "So, there's no you and Billy and yet a little birdy-" Stevie couldn't help but interrupt her with a snorted *Kathy*. Nancy didn't dignify that with a response, which was probably for the best. "A little birdy told me you went on a *date* with said officer of the law. And yet instead of going on another date, you're going to dinner at your ex's place."

Nancy gave her a long hard look, Stevie didn't know how to interpret it, but what she got out of it was Nan being mildly amused, with a hint of skepticism. Of course Stevie saw the irony in the situation; it was weird of her to be going to Jonathan's. Especially since they broke up and hadn't really spoken to each other after *that night*, but Stevie wasn't going for him. She was going to see Hopper and Joyce,

along with Jane and Will. Jonathan just happened to be there.

“Look,” Stevie broke off, the words catching in her throat. “ *Look* . I didn't come here for you to psychoanalyze my life choices so far. I've just- I've missed talking to you.” A strange look crossed Nancy's teardrop face, like she didn't understand. Like she didn't *want* to understand.

5:00 pm

Stevie was nervous. Not as nervous as her date with Billy, but it was definitely a close second. She wished Jonathan wouldn't be there and she wished Billy could've gone with her, but he had a date with Max and Susan that he couldn't wiggle himself out of. She understood. At least the mechanics of being in a family.

With her own family they didn't really do family meals. At least not ones she could remember. They were always personal affairs; if she was the first home then she'd be the one to make dinner. Which was usually *always* since her parents were never home if they could help it. At least she learned to be self sustaining.

So, when Stevie ran into Joyce at the grocery store, she couldn't really be blamed for jumping at the chance for a home cooked meal that she hadn't made. Joyce didn't even look mildly surprised when she took up the offer and instead squeezed her arm gently and gave her a motherly smile. Or at least what Stevie assumed one would look like. Of course now she was at a dilemma, should she dress up? What should she bring for food? Dessert, entrees, *drinks* ?

She was actually almost tempted to call Billy up and ask for his opinion, though he'd probably just give a fond '*sweetheart*' that would completely derail Stevie's thoughts and cause them to go in a completely different direction. Not that she'd be complaining. And Billy sure as hell wouldn't be, not with the way he had cringed at the thought of having to tag along with Max and Susan as they went

shopping at the Starcourt mall.

In the end she decided on bringing a batch of her homemade brownies that Billy loved. If the way he had barely contained a pornographic moan when he'd tried them was anything to go by; the Byers stood no chance.

When she got there, Stevie half expected to see Christmas lights adorning the house. She couldn't help herself when she looked at the walls to make sure they were all intact. They were, but it didn't stop Stevie from worrying. She didn't think it ever would.

"Stevie, honey!" Joyce called, Stevie caught her just in time to see her snuff out a cigarette.

Stevie quickly joined her on the porch, "I thought you were quitting?" Joyce rolled her eyes and smiled sheepishly at Stevie, her shoulders bunching up around her ears.

"Well, Jim was supposed to and I can't help it when he's smells like ash," Stevie nodded along. She could relate to that; ever since she quit, it took every fiber in her being to stay that way. Even after four years she still had to fight the urge.

"Hey Joyce, dinners done." Hop poked his head out of the door, a cigarette hanging from his lip, unlit. "Oh. Hey kid, how was your date?"

At the mentioned date, Stevie flushed and Joyce looked positively exultant. She briefly wondered if all mothers got this way when their kid went on a date. While she didn't outwardly show it, Stevie was as pleased as a snake who got the mouse.

"Oh! You finally went out with Billy didn't you? That's so exciting!" Joyce breathed, knocking Stevie back with how fast she spoke. She didn't even seem to take a breath between each sentence. "When are you going out again?"

"Uh-" Stevie didn't even know how to answer that. While Billy had shown interest in going out on another date, they hadn't really discussed it.

“Joyce. You're gonna scare her off before she's even given whatever *that* is.” Stevie followed Hopper's finger down to where she held the brownies. “Now get in here before the food either gets cold or our kids eat it all.”

5:53 pm

Martha Iaconna unceremoniously dropped her groceries on the kitchen table, a tired sigh escaping her. Ever since Marissa's death Martha had been facing an endless abyss. She'd never experienced something like this, she didn't know how to handle it and wondered if there even was a way to handle the murder of a best friend. If there was, she'd gladly take the advice.

It didn't help that Troy was being a little shit and was constantly talking back. Martha had no idea what had come over him, but it was a side she had never seen before and wished to never see again. Ever since coming back, Troy had been an entirely different person and maybe that was her fault. She knew how much he hated this town and she couldn't really blame Troy.

Ever since Will Byers went missing and then was found dead before coming back like Jesus Christ himself, the town had taken a turn for the worse. A dark cloud seemed to cover Hawkins, making the people nervous and restless. Martha herself had decided that she needed to get her family out of there and surprisingly James' mother had agreed.

The decision hadn't been made lightly, but when Troy came back from the quarry with a broken arm and a terrified gleam in his eyes, the choice had been made. So, they left Hawkins and Martha thought she'd officially left the town in her rearview mirror. Of course when Marissa called asking for help with some furniture. She couldn't refuse an old friend and decided to drag Troy- who pulled James along- for old times sake.

Knock. Knock. Knock. Martha jumped at the sudden noise. It was loud and brash, as if the person knew no one was home, but decided to check anyways.

“Troy?” Martha placed the milk down on the counter, closing the fridge in the process. She'd put it in there right after, she didn't need the milk spoiling. “Troy did you forget your keys again?”

She made her way out of the kitchen and into the entranceway; a strange feeling coming over her. As she reached down towards the handle, her sixth sense seemed to scream at her to *turn around* . Heeding the warning, Martha pulled her hand back and immediately went to the kitchen, grabbing the phone before making a hasty retreat upstairs to her room.

She didn't know why her immediate response was to call 911, but Martha decided it was best to just follow her instincts. So, with adrenaline rushing through her blood, she quickly dialed and waited for the dispatcher.

“Hawkins Police Station. What's your emergency?” The sound of Flo's voice was a godsend and had a feeling of relief sweeping through her.

“Flo. It's Martha Iaconna. I think someone's trying to break in,” the sound of the door opening had Martha's heart rate beating a rapid tattoo against her breastbone. Relying completely on her fight or flight response, Martha tiptoed to her window.

“Martha-” Flo seemed to break off for a moment, “Martha you need to leave your house immediately. I'm sending officers to you right now, so just stay calm.” Martha hummed quietly and peered down at the driveway. She wouldn't be able to make the jump without seriously harming herself, since the condo they were staying in had no balcony or porch lining the front. “Martha-”

She was abruptly cut off by the sound of cursing and vicious swears coming from downstairs and Martha knew. She *knew* . “I can't make the jump. It'll kill me.”

With her mind made up, Martha quickly raced into her closet, knowing it was a fool's choice, but having no other option. She

quietly shut the door and made a retreat to the corner where a black box was hidden under a pile of sweaters. As she looked frantically, Flo tried to reassure her the police were almost there, and as the burglars got closer, Martha's calm and efficient search turned frantic and hazardous.

Just as the bedroom door was kicked open with a *bang*, Martha found what she was looking for. She turned with her back against the corner and stared hard at the closet door. Her heart was in her throat when someone spoke, making it just about flop out of her and onto the carpet.

"Let's get the jewelry and get the fuck out of here man!" It was accompanied by the sound of furniture being overturned, which had Martha squeezing her eyes shut and sweat start to bead at her temples. "*Shit!* There's nothing here!"

"Check the closet dumbass," came a voice that had Martha's heart freezing and her brain short circuiting. *It couldn't be.*

She had to forcibly shake her head to refocus when she noticed that the first voice was making its way towards her hiding spot. With a deep inhale, Martha steadied her grip and aimed right where she knew a chest would be. And as the door opened, Martha squeezed the trigger, knowing instantly the wires to the taser had connected as a choked off moan filled the air.

"You little shi-" the words were instantly cut off as the second voice's previously concealed gun went off. Hitting Martha squarely in the chest, followed quickly by two more shots. And as her body slumped listlessly to the ground, covering the phone that held Flo on the other side, the voice could be heard muttering a nasty '*finally.*'

8. Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

I'd just like to say that I got some hate for my entire story on the last chapter and while I enjoy constructive criticism, **I will not tolerate being called offensive names.** If you have a problem with this story then don't read it. I hate making notes like this, and I don't mean to offend anyone, but please. **Do not come on here to only insult my story!** I took time and effort to make *Lawless* and I hope people just enjoy it for the fiction it is.



"People are not who or where we think they are. And there is someone who watches from an unknown location."

- Michael Ondaatje

Hawkins, Indiana

March 1, 1984

8:42 pm

“Am I dreaming or is that you Harrington?” Billy called from his camaro’s open door, a cigarette dangling from his fingers and the ever present smirk in place.

Stevie stepped down from the porch, dish towel clutched firmly in her grip, “yeah it’s me, don’t cream your pants.” She instinctively placed her hands on her hips, the pose much like a mother scolding her child.

Stevie blinked aggressively when another onslaught of tears threatened to spill over. Even though it had been mutually agreed, Stevie still couldn’t believe that Jon and her were done. That he had *slept* with Nancy and that Nancy had done that to her. It was just icing on the cake when Billy showed up in his full on date clothes. She had completely forgotten that Billy had asked her if she was working tonight. She knew he had planned on stopping by during her shift, but at some point Stevie had completely forgotten that Dustin had called out sick for her.

She could very clearly make out the hurt and anger in his eyes, hidden under a reddening bruise that had Stevie’s teeth on edge. She knew where that mark came from, she just wished Billy would speak to Hopper.

“What are you doing here Hargrove?” The hurt that flashed behind his ocean blue eyes was completely genuine and had Stevie wincing at her harsh tone. She couldn’t help it, she wasn’t angry at Billy, but he was an easy target because he *was there* .

“I’m here for Maxine,” he drawled, the hurt easily hidden by a suave facade, his tongue rolling over his teeth. “I heard she was here.”

“Well you heard wrong,” Stevie stalled, praying the kids had listened to her and *stayed hidden*. “So you can leave,” she gestured back to his car, ignoring her insides screaming for him to *stay* and *don’t go* .

He glanced over her shoulder, which had Stevie turning as well, just in time to see the kids ducking back down. “You know,” Billy said from behind him, “I really hate being lied to sweetheart.”

Stevie gasped when he brushed by her, his fingers brushing through

the strands at the back of her neck. Maybe it was being called a liar or when Billy had touched her so softly, like she was something precious, but as soon as Billy stepped onto the front step; something inside her broke.

With a harsh sob, that could've been Billy's name, Stevie rushed forward. He stopped at the sound of her moving towards him, his back tense, but that didn't deter her. If anything, it only fueled her more and with another cry, Stevie flung herself at him. He must've been waiting to be hit, so when Stevie crashed into his back, arms around his waist and forehead digging between his shoulders. He wasn't prepared and went stumbling forward, barely catching himself on the porch.

"Stevie?" He asked, shock clearly evident in his tone, even though Stevie couldn't see his face from her place at his back. "What-"

"I'm sorry," she said wetly, horrified to be called a liar and so *hurt* that Jon cheated on her. *She* wasn't the liar, *she* never cheated on someone she loved. Or claimed to. "I didn't- it's not what it looks like. I'm sorry."

It was silent, except for Stevie's wet sniffing and the sounds of the parties muffled voices. Dustin's could be clearly heard, saying something about how "Stevie looks like she's winning guys!" Whatever that meant.

When Billy didn't move or struggle from her grip, Stevie pulled away. Half hoping he'd stop her and fearing that he would. She stepped back and away from him, moving so he was standing alone on the step and she was back on solid ground. A clear separation between them now. Billy still hadn't moved and the very clear disgust that was coming off him had Stevie's face flushing with shame.

The next wave of tears couldn't be stopped and Stevie tried *so hard* to hold it in. The feeling of shame only enhancing the need to cry and so, without caring anymore, Stevie cupped her face and started to cry. They were harsh sobs that took her breath away and had her shoulders hunching down and her knees wobbling. So it came as a huge surprise when strong arms wrapped around her. One hand going to her shoulders and the other around her waist.

"It's okay. You're okay," Billy murmured, his grip tightening when Stevie tried to struggle away. "Just breathe baby," he whispered, rocking them back and forth. "I'm not going anywhere." Stevie didn't realize until that moment, how worried she'd been for that exact reason.

May 3, 1988

11:27 pm

Billy was ten seconds away from shooting his radio if it went off *one more time*. It hadn't stopped for the last few minutes and while Billy would usually answer right away, he'd rather lay in bed with Stevie. Who, after her dinner with the Hopper-Byers family, had immediately drove to Billy's place. He hadn't even been surprised when he found her knocking at his door.

Well, Max greeted her before yelling about how 'his girlfriend was here.' Before the little shit had immediately returned to her spot on the couch, her feet moving to their place on his back as he did his nightly push-ups. Billy didn't even blink at this development, even more so, when Stevie walked in with some pizza and leftovers from her dinner.

She easily squeezed herself into the cozy moment like a missing piece, completing the puzzle that had been empty for years. While Max ate the offered food and Billy finished up his exercise, they decided to watch *Raiders of The Lost Ark*. An amicable silence surrounding them during the moment and Billy paused to embrace it.

He'd never had moments like these, maybe with his mom, but Billy barely remembered her. And Neil never would've made time for *this*. A quiet moment between family, instead Neil had swallowed up those few and far between times with screaming and a neverending feeling of pain. But it was different, having Stevie here- in this house. Stevie's presence was like a fresh bottle of water after a day out in the

ocean.

According to Max, Billy almost swooned when Stevie shyly asked if she could stay the night. The key word being *almost* because Billy Hargrove did not swoon. He'd just had to use the wall as support for a moment, and that wasn't surprising since he'd been meaning to replace the old entry rug. The heavy fabric had a mind of its own and just liked to bunch up and form air pockets.

Either way, Max couldn't prove anything and Billy was admitting to nothing. He would admit though, seeing Stevie laying in *his* bed was probably the start of every fantasy he ever had. Too bad they literally went to bed, but Billy would be damned if he didn't at least admit that sleeping with Stevie was the first time in a long while where he slept through the night. It was refreshing, until he woke up to his radio insistently making static noises.

He meant to answer it, honestly. But when he started to, Stevie made this adorable sniffing noise before promptly throwing an arm out, draped over his shoulders, before she sent an aggressive kick to the back of his knees. He ended up completely forgetting about the radio, instead opting to roll back over. Instinctively tucking his nose into the top of her hair.

May 4, 1988

5:54 am

"Billy? Billy c'mon. Get up!" He groaned as the blinds in his room were peeled back, effectively startling him into reaching for the gun hidden under his mattress. "I know it's early blondie, but if you don't answer your radio I'm gonna murder you."

Billy glared from his spot under the mass of blankets, his hair- from the mirror to the right of Stevie- revealed a thoroughly sleep deprived man, who looked ten seconds away from setting someone on fire.

"What the fuck? Stevie. Sweetheart, come back to bed." Unsurprisingly, Billy's pleas landed on deaf ears. Stevie instead sent him a scathing look before promptly throwing the radio at him.

"Answer. It." Her hard expression easily transformed into one of angelic peace. The dual looks that appeared so quickly after each other had Billy gulping and his finger itching for his gun. "I'll make us some coffee!" Sometimes he forgot this was the same person who had taken a demodogs head off, he'd try not to make that mistake again.

Billy rolled out of bed to the sounds of the TV turning on, accompanied by Stevie rifling through their cupboards. He couldn't contain the pleasure that washed over him at how domestic it all was and hoped he'd have more mornings like this.

Suddenly through the radio's static, Billy heard sharp clear voice. A very familiar voice that had Billy scrambling for the dresser. "Hargrove. *Pick up* ."

"Chief! Sorry I-" he wasn't even able to get out a full apology, as Hopper quickly spoke over him.

His voice was hard and urgent, "have you seen the news?"

Billy shook his head before realizing Hopper couldn't see it. "No. Why-" he trailed off as he made his way out to the living room, where Stevie stood at the back of the couch. Coffee pot long forgotten in her hands.

"Billy-" she started, glancing over at him as Hopper continued to talk.

"There's been another murder. It's-"

"I know." He couldn't tear his eyes away from the newscaster, whose expression, while grim, showed a strange gleam in his eyes.

"-the body of Martha Iaconna was found late last night by her son Troy Iaconna." The news anchor shuffled his papers, " Police are not saying if this was foul play, but with the recent murder of Marissa Walden it's very likely. Next up: is this the work of a serial killer?"

"I have to go," Billy quickly told Stevie and then told Hopper he was on his way, all the while racing into his room. Stevie followed him, the coffee pot still clasped in her hands. "Can you drive Max to school? I hate to put this on you. No, that's stupid. I'll just-"

He was cut off from a harried apology as Stevie squeezed his arm, prompting Billy to turn and look at her. "It's okay. I don't mind and besides I think it'll do Max some good." She spared him a small and strained smile. Billy had never seen a more beautiful sight.

"I'll see you tonight?" He asked suddenly, not only surprising Stevie, but himself as well. He hadn't meant to ask, but just the thought of going to work and not seeing Stevie again that day, had his heart beating a rapid tattoo.

"I- yeah. I'll be here," this time when she smiled, it wasn't strained. Instead Stevie's smile was carefree and downright *pleased*. She looked like the cat who got the canary and Billy didn't care that in this scenario, *he* was the canary.

"Okay," he breathed, fixing his hair and leaning in to press a quick-yet sweet kiss against her lips. "I'll see you tonight."

6:11 am

"Goddamn it!" Jim threw his arms across his desk, sweeping it clean of all the memorabilia and files that had clustered the surface. "*Goddamn it.*"

"Chief!" Flo gasped, a hand pressed to her stomach as she watched him pound his fist against the top of the desk. "Stop that. You'll only hurt yourself."

He paused long enough to spare her a glare, "they're taunting us Flo. Those bastards are *taunting us*."

Sighing, Flo leaned back out into the precinct, speaking softly with

someone on the other side. "Who's there Flo? Let'em in." He didn't hear what she said to the person, but when the door was pushed open wider, he got a clear view of Hargrove leaning against Callahan's desk with a hard look in his eyes.

"We're gonna catch them Hop. Don't believe for a second that we won't." Jim wanted to believe him, but it had been over a month since Marissa's murder and no suspects had since appeared. He was still waiting on Sam and so far nothing had been heard on the video or the suspects that had been seen in it.

Billy shuffled the rest of the way into his office, giving Flo a reassuring look before shutting the door. Leaving them alone in Jim's now messy office. "Are we sure it was the same person?"

"Yes. They used a glock pistol, just like Marissa's case. And both vics were found in a closet, both woman." He listed off, ticking each point off on a finger, his frustration only rising, "and yet. Not a single thing connects them other than they knew each other. No old boyfriends or ex-husbands. Not even a shared love interest."

"Okay. So we need to look at this from another angle," Billy kneeled down and started pushing files back into their folders. "Let's go talk to Troy and see what he has to say. Alright?"

7:02 am

"Thanks for coming in Troy. I know this must be hard," Hopper said, glancing down at his notes. "We just need to know what happened last night."

Troy stared at the two of them and Billy ached at the pain that he could see in the teens eyes. "I was-" he broke off into a snuffle, "I was with James at his place. When I called my mom and she didn't answer I got worried."

"And where is James staying?" Billy asked, leaning forward and

making Troy look at him.

“He's at his grandma's. *We* were at his grandma's,” Troy emphasized, his grip on the table's edge making it clear how distraught he was. “Do you guys have a suspect?”

The accusatory tone had Billy sitting up straighter and Hopper glaring at Troy, “no. We don't have any right now.” It was said through gritted teeth and had Billy internally wincing in his chair next to Hop. “When you got there. Did anything seem off or was anything missing?”

Troy's gaze sharpened at the question before widening in shock, “yes! Her car was missing, which I found strange since she wouldn't let me take it ‘cause of the tires.”

Billy shared a glance with Hopper before writing it down. He hadn't been to the crime scene, but from Hops face, this bit of information was true. “Thank you. If you have anything else or you remember something, don't hesitate to call.”

“Yeah, okay.” As Billy shook hands with Troy, Flo opened the door and called Hopper over. And by the time he was done walking Troy out, Hopper was locked away in his office with the blinds drawn down. He decided to put out an APB on Mrs. Iaconna's missing Toyota.

7:04 am

“So, we've got it pretty cleared up.” Sam said, his voice tiny over the phone, “it's still fairly grainy, but my guys we're able to get a fairly clear picture of your faces.”

Jim stared hard at the picture of Joyce, Jane, Will and Jonathan. He couldn't believe they were finally getting a break and to possibly have their murderers caught on tape- it was amazing. He decided that after this, he was taking a vacation with his family and finally doing

something he should've a long time ago. The velvet box burning a hole in his desks drawer, a testament to how long it was overdue.

“When can you send it?” Jim demanded, picking up the frame and brushing a finger over Joyce's beaming face.

“I've already sent it, but it'll take a few days. I'm sorry.” Jim couldn't care less for Sam's apology, he was just glad that they may have something now.

“Don't be,” Jim grinned as he put the frame down.

Notes for the Chapter:

I really struggled with this chapter and I know I posted later than usual. I'm sorry! Hopefully it was as good as the other ones.

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry I didn't post yesterday! I have a hockey tournament and it's been pretty crazy! Hopefully this chapter makes up for the tardiness.



PSLARDIN

"The probability of a certain set of circumstances coming together in a meaningful (or tragic) way is so low that it simply cannot be considered mere coincidence."

-V.C. King

Hawkins, Indiana

May 10, 1984

9:31 am

"We're graduating soon." A sharp glance was sent Billy's way, but he didn't mind. Couldn't care less really. If this was how he was going to get Stevie's attention then he was prepared to do everything to keep it on him and *only him*.

And it was true, Billy thought, they were graduating soon and all the bullshit of high school would be gone. *Finally* . But with that came trepidation for the unknown. They *were* graduating, and yet Billy had no idea what he was going to do after the caps were thrown. He had no plans besides one.

Leaving Hawkins.

Of course, Billy mused, completely ignoring whatever the teacher was saying about Macbeth. He never planned for Stevie and Billy- well. He didn't want to leave Stevie. He wanted to bring her with him to Cali and to show her where he grew up.

He wanted to show her the first place he ever surfed and where his mom taught him to swim. Billy wanted to show Stevie the house he grew up in, even with the bad memories that accompanied it. *He wanted*. Even though Billy knew that it couldn't happen, not in a million years would Stevie- the girl of his dreams- ever agree to leave Hawkins.

She wouldn't. She *couldn't*.

It didn't stop him from loving her. And wanting.

Stevie gave soft hum as she jotted another note. Smiling softly when

Billy casually brushed his fingers along her shoulder as he stretched.

“Hey,” Tommy's nagging voice slithered its way into Billy's thoughts. Ruining the intimate moment. “What did she say?”

Billy raised an unimpressed eyebrow. Giving Tommy a show of him looking at his doodled notebook. It wasn't like he needed to take notes, his school back in Cali had already talked about Macbeth. Stevie snorted.

“Sorry man. Wasn't paying attention.” He focused back on his note free pages. “Why don't you ask Wheeler?” At this suggestion, a horrified Tommy snapped his gaze towards Billy, who still didn't spare the guy an ounce of his attention.

“What's your problem? Did the queen finally cut off your balls?” Stevie stiffened in disgust, opening her mouth to say something, but didn't bother. Not when Billy was easily handling it. Not when Tommy flinched back at the dangerous look Billy sent his way, knocking over his binder and spilling his papers onto the floor.

“Mr. Hargrove. Mr. Hart. Is there a problem?” Mrs. Reid called, pausing in her sentence of how life altering Macbeth was.

Billy leaned back, crossing his arms and purposefully extenuating his arm muscles. He could feel not only the teachers gaze, but everyone else's too. Only one gaze had him going hot with pleasure. “Nah, no problem Mrs. R. Tommy didn't catch what you said earlier.”

The look Tommy sent him could freeze water, but Billy had seen worse. He still made sure to remember though because Billy knew a snake like Tommy wouldn't forgive or forget. Not until revenge put them on equal ground. He'd have to keep a close eye on the brunette. You never could trust people like Tommy. Besides, snakes were only dangerous when they felt threatened.

May 6, 1988

3:01 pm

"...police have put out an APB for the missing car of Martha Iaconna. The car is a grey 1977 subaru, if spotted please contact the police immediately-" Stevie stared transfixed as the news anchor continued to discuss Mrs. Iaconna's death like it was the coolest thing to happen since sliced bread. And while it disgusted her, a part of Stevie could understand the excitement, she just wouldn't call it that.

It was more like when Will went missing. An ever present cloud of paranoia seemed to hang over *everyone*, making people lock their doors for the first time in four years and had neighbors watching each other. Had couples, siblings and friends asking themselves *are they the murderer? Did they do this? Could they do this?* It was awful and gut wrenching.

"Hey Stevie!" Marsha called from the kitchen window, giving Stevie a kind smile that reminded her so much of Barb that it forced her to look away out of shame. "Can you take the trash out back? The boys were supposed to do it last night, but- well. Boys will be boys," she laughed, pushing the hairnet she wore back to its original spot on her hairline.

"Yeah 'course, Mrs. Holland." Stevie quickly tucked her pen and notepad into her apron and gave the diner a cursory glance to make sure no one needed anything. Of the three patrons, only one of them was actually eating, so Stevie took that for the opening it was and head back to the kitchen.

Grabbing the barrel with one hand and the bag with the other, Stevie gave a tug. As she tugged again, Marsha's chipper voice rang out above her crouched form. "Oh honey, you know you can call me Marsha."

Stevie could only grunt as she pushed at the barrel, a brief thought of using her tennis shoe as a wedge crossing mind before immediately being dismissed. "You know-" *yank*, "I could never-" *yank*, "call you that," she gave a final tug that had the bag ripping free of the container and caused her to stagger back against the linoleum wall. "You'll always be Mrs. Holland to me," the words tasted like wet chalk and a large part of her wished Marsha would just drop the subject and move on.

Especially when it would inevitably lead them to *Barb* and Stevie, no matter how old- would never be ready for that conversation. Marsha pursed her lips, but otherwise said nothing, Stevie took that as permission to head out with the trash. As she hit the back exit, Stevie carefully kicked the rock into its spot; which placed it right between the door and its frame, leaving about an inch of space between the two.

It was when she was heaving the bag over her shoulder, getting ready to throw it into the dumpster, that she saw something. *The something* - as in, the car that was just on the news. As in the car that was, or had been, Martha Iaconna's. Completely forgetting about the trash, Stevie booked for the door, going so fast she accidentally ran into it before righting herself and yanking the metal so hard, Marsha dropped the dish she had been washing.

"Oh! Stevie," Marsha scolded softly, stooping down to pick up the discarded dish. "That poor boy Troy and his friend just walked in. I told them you'd be right-"

Not sparing Marsha a second, Stevie hastily shoved past her, calling a half hearted apology as she ran out into the main floor. She almost felt bad when she had to force an old man out of her way so she could reach the pay phone. Using the coin he'd just put in, Stevie called 911, barely hearing Flo pick up over her pounding heart.

"Hawkins Police Department. What is your emergency?" Stevie took a moment to recognize the trepidation that she could easily hear in Flo's voice and knew it was because she feared hearing another person die.

"Flo! Mrs. Iaconna's car is in the diner's parking lot!" She whispered, rather loudly, if the looks she was receiving from the nearby tables. Troy especially was watching her with intense interest from over James' shoulder, the look in his eyes had Stevie shivering. And she wondered if he could hear what she was saying and then wondered why that bothered her so much.

"The Chief will be there with one of the deputies," Flo said, the sound of paper could be heard from over the phone before Stevie faintly made out the sound of Hopper's voice. "Stay put and don't approach

the vehicle.”

3:29 pm

“And you’re sure you saw no one near the vehicle? At any point?” Stevie sighed through her nose and sent Hopper an annoyed glare. He’d asked this question at least three times- this being the third.

“Yes. Like I said, I came out with the trash and saw the car just sitting there,” she gestured angrily at the subaru, hoping through her jabbing that he’d understand her. “You can even check the security tape if you don’t believe me!”

“It’s not that I don’t believe you,” Hopper sighed, rubbing at the pinched skin around his eyes before stiffening. “Wait. Did you say video tape?”

Stevie leaned back instinctively, startled by the sudden interest and giddiness that was emanating from Hop. Nodding cautiously, Stevie shrugged her head to the propped door, “I could show you.”

“Hargrove!” Hopper yelled, causing the other deputies to scatter like doves as Billy suddenly materialized from the car’s open door. Stevie was almost sad to lose the view his bent over position afforded her. “Get over here. Stevie has says there’s a tape. You find anything?”

“Yeah,” Billy called, adjusting his holster as he walked towards them. “Found some-” he hesitated when he saw Stevie watching them, but at Hopper’s insistence kept going. “There was a bloody shoe print and what looked like a fingerprint on Mrs. Iaconna’s mail. They’re taking processing it right now.”

“Looks like they’re getting sloppy,” Hopper grinned a mean grin, his eyes hard and his mustache quivering. “I want everyone questioned in there. And know one. I repeat *no one* can know that Stevie called it in.”

Stevie stiffened at this, her eyes narrowing in on the significant look the two shared. “What? Why?” While she was looking at Billy, Stevie

was speaking to Hopper. She just knew that between the two, only one of them was weak to her cow eyes.

Hopper sighed, his shoulders slumping in defeat before tightening up once more. Stevie almost thought she had imagined the brief display of weakness, but from the way Billy's eyes tightened, she knew that wasn't true. "We think they're targeting woman. Specifically ones, who are living alone."

Stevie stiffened at Hopper's words, suddenly sensing the true danger that she was in by discovering the abandoned car. Her insides had turned to ice and her mouth felt dry, without thinking, Stevie sought out Billy's gaze, her heart seeming to calm at the protective look that had come into his eyes.

"The tape," he gently encouraged, nudging Stevie's shoulder with his finger. "C'mon darling. I got you." She ignored Hopper's good natured gag, instead focusing on standing up and heading back inside. She led them out of the kitchen and into the main floor. Stevie unknowingly averted her gaze from Troy and James' table, making sure they stayed clear of the table on their way to the security-office room.

"It's password protected," Stevie carefully sat down in the empty seat. "Give me a second and I'll have this opened in a jiffy." But when Stevie typed in her password and clicked *enter*, nothing happened, sitting up straighter, Stevie tried again with the same result. "Huh?" she leaned back and spared Hopper and Billy an apologetic glance, "sorry. I'll call my boss and see if she can get it to work."

Stevie flinched at the exasperated and frustrated look Hopper was giving the computer. She understood why he looked the way he did and completely accepted that he wasn't mad at her, but just at the situation they were precariously placed in. She knew from the sleepless nights Billy experienced that these murders bothered him; not only that, but he was frustrated with the situation. How everytime they took a few steps forward, some unknown force seemed fit to place obstacles that set them back by a whole jump.

She understood .

Billy placed a comforting hand on her neck when she shivered. Remembering the cold eyes from a corner booth and the way they hadn't blinked when she made eye contact. She placed a hand over Billy's and ignored the look Hopper gave them, if the fondness in his eyes was any indication, he didn't care about the PDA.

"Well, call your boss and have her get back to us as soon as she can," Stevie lurched forward at the aggressive, familial slap to her back. Right between the shoulders, which was sure to leave a bruise. "I'm not letting these son's of bitches get away again."

"Right," even as she spoke, Stevie was already dialing her boss' number. Hoping she'd pick up so Hopper would stop glaring at the phone in her hand. Just as Stevie started to sweat and Hopper looked like he was about to rip the phone apart, she finally picked up. "Hey! I uh- I need you to come down to the diner. It's-" at Hopper and Billy's imploring looks, "-an emergency," she tacked on.

4:03 pm

"Sorry again for being late. I had to pick the kids up from daycare," Heather quickly shoved her things onto a nearby shelf, knocking some knick knacks over. At their empty stares and Stevie's nervous fidget, Heather sat down with a *plop* and promptly started typing away. Easily bypassing the employee lock screen and entering into the video feed with two clicks. "Here we go," she mumbled nervously.

Jim leaned forward bracing his hand against the back of her chair. Causing her to lean forward at the added pressure and knocking her breath away. Jim paid it no mind as he rewound the video tape until he saw the car pull in. He paused it right as the door opened and told Stevie and Heather to give them the room. Heather left with no argument, but Stevie paused. She stepped towards Billy, who clasped her hand and whispered a '*see you later*,' before she headed out. Leaving them alone.

Jim took a deep breath to steady his heartbeat and the minute shakes in his fingers. He pressed the space-bar. Together they watched as

Martha's car door opened, unbelieving that they were about to see their possible killers.

The figure on the screen was obscured by the car door, his back to the camera. For a heart pounding moment, Jim feared they wouldn't see the guys face. The mantra *turn turn turn* , pumping through his blood. The suspect turned, his face in clear view of the camera. Jim's breath hitched, his fists clenched. Billy stiffened beside him, making an aborted move towards the door. His hand on the handle of his gun.

“How did we miss this.” Billy demanded, his gaze trained on the screen where their perp was frozen mid step.

“I don't know and I don't care. Make sure he hasn't left,” Jim snapped, his eyes never leaving the screen. Not until Billy left with a slam of the door, did Jim slump over the rolling chair. ‘ *How could they have missed this?*’

Notes for the Chapter:

Who's our culprit!?! Welp, you can guess, but I won't be revealing until next chapter I think. Sorry!

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for the short hiatus, but this was a monster of a chapter that hopefully makes up for the week long absence! It gets pretty intense and as a heads up **blood and violence** in this chapter!



"I can never fight for myself, but for others...I can kill."

- *Emilie Automn*

Hawkins, Indiana

June 7, 1984

9:31 pm

"Pass me a straw?" Stevie asked, holding out her hand without so much as a glance in Billy's direction. He grinned, and snatched one up, passing it over to her pale fingers. Just as the paper touched her skin, Billy paused, waiting. It wasn't until she looked up with a fond huff that Billy swooped in and pressed a kiss against her chapped lips.

He didn't let up and Stevie gave just as much, completely forgetting about the straw as she confidently wound her arms around his shoulders. Together, they leaned backwards, Stevie spread across Billy's chest and his back pressed tightly against the blanket he'd stolen from Neil's car. The only light source came from the camaro's lights,, casting them- especially Stevie- in a yellow haze that only seemed to enhance her square face and sharpen the angles of her jaw.

She took his breath away. And not just because she was kissing him as if a demogorgon was looking over them. As if it was their last kiss. And maybe it was. They were graduating tomorrow and yet Billy didn't care- could care *less* that tomorrow was marking a new milestone. That, in Neil's eyes, he was now an adult and would have to pitch in. Like he didn't do that already.

"Come with me," Billy whispered against Stevie's panting mouth. "Please. Come with me."

Stevie paused, leaning backwards and away from Billy. Now that he could see her face, Billy wished he didn't. Stevie looked confused and concerned, something he never wished to see on her. He thought they were past it after Billy admitted to Stevie about Neil. About the abuse. Back then, with blood dripping from his collarbone and a bruising stomach, Stevie had given him the same look. He never

thought he'd see it again.

"What do you mean? Are- are you leaving?" Stevie pushed even further away, so that she sat back on Billy's thighs. Her hands were placed firmly in her own lap and her eyes were glowing in the dying sun. She was so beautiful and Billy *ached* with the need to hold her.

With that thought in mind, Billy did just that. Sitting up, he quickly wrapped an arm around her waist, trapping Stevie. She just looked mildly amused, though the confusion won out and she placed a small hand on his jaw. Holding his gaze, Stevie asked, "what are you talking about baby?"

He closed his eyes as she rubbed the pads of her fingers against the bottom of his lip. "I'm going to California. Right after we graduate," he sighed, loosening his grip on her hips. "Come with me sweetheart. You're dying here. *I'm* dying here. Come with me."

"Billy-"

His grip tightened again. "Please princess. You're always talking about moving outa here. I'm giving you that chance."

"I can't Billy," Stevie pushed away until she sat across the blanket. A sudden space between them that not even Billy was willing to cross. "You know I can't."

His fists tightened at the words, but just as suddenly as the anger rose, it quickly dissipated. He knew it was a foolish hope, Stevie would never leave Hawkins. She'd never leave the party she called her kids and it was wrong of him to think she'd put herself first for once. Stevie just wasn't that kind of gal. Billy knew that and quiet suddenly realized he couldn't leave. Not yet and probably not ever. Not without his sweetheart.

May 6, 1988

5:21 pm

"Why'd you do it Tommy?" Billy watched with barely contained fury. He couldn't believe his best friend. *He couldn't believe it* . And yet- yet he *could* . He could see it in the way he'd always been quick to violence. Like a rabid dog just waiting for his chain to snap. How every fight Billy had ever gotten into had been cheered on by Tommy. Hell, Tommy had instigated ninety percent of the fights. Though he never fought himself.

"I didn't do shit Hopper," Tommy leaned forward, rattling the handcuffs as he bent over the table. They were separated into the newest part of the diner, a warm cozy area that had kaleidoscope glass panels that allowed a constant stream of sunlight to filter in, reflecting an array of rainbows on the tables and floor. "C'mon Billy! I'm your best friend!"

"You tampered with police evidence!" He shot back, halfway out of his seat before realizing his error. Tommy smirked triumphantly at getting under Billy's tough skin, but the smile was short lived, as Hopper smoothly cut in.

"It's Chief Hopper and Deputy Hargrove," Hopper gestured between them. "Right now we're not your friends. *He's* not your friend. This is a police investigation and you are being accused of two murders." He sent both of them a withering glare, though Billy's was more of a reminder, "so cut the bullshit and answer the question."

It was silent for a beat, as if Tommy was equally stunned at Hopper's harsh tone and the accusations being laid out before him. As if he couldn't decide what was worse. "Look. I didn't do it. I swear on Carol's life that I didn't do it." At Hopper's unimpressed expression, Tommy pressed trembling fingers to his lips, "I gotta kid guys. I wouldn't- *couldn't* do it."

Billy stiffened in his seat, unsure all of a sudden with their line of questioning. With *who* they were questioning. From what he remembered since they last talked, Tommy and Carol didn't have any kids. Of course, they did tell him they were trying for one, but Billy hadn't given it any mind. Now though? Billy turned confused eyes to Hopper, who looked nonplussed as he came to the same conclusion.

He sighed, tucking the pictures of Marissa and Martha back into their respective files. “Stand up.”

“What?” Tommy froze, looking between the two of them. Not comprehending what Hopper had just said.

“Get up. Until you clear up your story, you'll be spending the foreseeable future in a jail cell.” He pulled himself out of his seat, moving towards a gaping Tommy. “You're under arrest for the murders of Marissa Walden and Martha Iaconna. You have the right-” as Hopper read Tommy's miranda rights, Billy's gaze was focused on the door separating their little room off from the rest of the building. His eyes solely on Stevie, who sat behind the counter with terror in her eyes and a pale face. She was gripping her mug like her life depended on it and her gaze seemed to be focused on something in the corner, though from his angle Billy couldn't see what.

He brushed it aside, knowing that Carol had been sitting right next to the corner booth and probably looked just as shell shocked. He really hoped they were right, but Billy suddenly had a niggling doubt. He couldn't place his finger on it right then, but Billy knew it was going to bother him until he remembered. He just hoped it wasn't important.

May 8, 1988

3:39 pm

Stevie jumped at the rough knocking on her door, suddenly terrified that *he* was there. Right outside her door, just waiting for her to fall into a false sense of security. She quickly shut the TV off, cutting the news reporter mid-sentence, which was fine by her since all the news has talked about was the murders and subsequent arrest of Tommy Hart. Stevie still didn't believe it.

“Hey! Stevie baby. Open up, I'm melting out here!” Billy called from

the other side of the door. Just hearing his voice had Stevie's shoulders dropping and her fingers releasing the handle of the bat she now kept by her at all times. "So's the ice cream!" He sing-songed, stepping back with wide eyes as Stevie hurriedly ripped the door open, her eyes hungry.

"Get in here," she took a fistful of his t-shirt and *yanked* him forward. Nearly knocking the paper bag from his grip in her hurry to have what was inside. "Oh! That's good," she moaned, having ripped the cover and plastic off. She licked the top of the ice cream again, not caring how she looked or how messy she was.

"Um- I have. Uh spoons," Billy stumbled. Stevie paused long enough to snatch the plastic utensil from his grasp before making a retreat to the living room. Billy followed closely behind, joining her on the couch and not saying anything about the nail studded bat that sat by her leg. For a good hour, Stevie sat with her head on Billy's shoulder, ice cream practically gone while they watched TV.

It wasn't until the fifth episode of *Mash* that Billy finally broke the silence. "You alright?"

"Yeah, of course." She tried not to fidget when his gaze jumped down to the bat. He didn't believe her and she really couldn't blame him. *She* didn't even believe herself. "I'm just-" she tossed the empty carton away, tugging a strand of hair in frustration. "I just don't think Tommy did it."

"No?" He raised an eyebrow, licking his spoon for excess cream. "Why do you think that?"

Stevie shivered as she remembered cold eyes glaring at her with hate as she escorted Billy and Hop to the security room. There had been so *much* hate. Even now, with Billy- a trained police officer sitting beside her- Stevie still felt fear. Fear for her *life*.

"I just. What about the other killer." An inscrutable look filled his eyes, Stevie pressed on. "You said there were two killers. It doesn't make sense for Tommy to commit these murders when he's never read a book in his life or interacted with Martha. It doesn't make sense and you know it!"

Billy opened his mouth to answer, but Stevie lost focus on him. She could've sworn she saw something move out of the sight of her window. The living room faced the trees so maybe what she'd seen was just a squirrel. She highly doubted someone would try anything when Stevie knew Billy had driven the squad car here. Shaking her head and giving a breathy laugh, Stevie grasped Billy's hand and led him out to her bedroom.

"Let's go to bed. It's been a long day," releasing Billy, Stevie lunged backwards onto her mattress. Letting the memory foam envelope her and her pillows swaddle her. Billy looked on from the end of the bed with a strange look in his eyes, his mouth opened like he was about to say something. But at the last second seemed to think better of it.

"Yeah, let's go to bed," he easily undressed before flopping onto the bed beside her. Stevie laughed as was rolled into his side by the added weight.

Suddenly remembering her fears, Stevie snuggled closer to Billy's warmth. Unsure if her clinginess would be humored or briskly rebuffed. While she swam in her inner turmoil, Billy had taken the time to readjust himself so that Stevie ended up under the blanket with him wrapped around her.

"I got you Stevie," he sealed the deal with a dry kiss to her forehead.

May 9, 1988

7:42 pm

Two days had passed after Tommy's arrest, allowing the town to slowly relax with the knowledge that the police had finally caught their killer. Stevie was also feeling the calmness that seemed to have seeped into every nook and cranny of Hawkins, like even the town was heaving a sigh of relief from the constant fear that had hung over them for almost three months. But even with newfound calm, Stevie

felt like something was missing, like they'd made a grave mistake.

At least that's what she thought, but Stevie also knew how paranoid she'd become as of two days ago. She kept *seeing* things. At one point, while she was out shopping yesterday, Stevie could've sworn she saw someone in her rearview mirror, straight across the parking lot and just at the edge of the woods. From what she saw, the figure had a hood on and a ski mask, but other than that, Stevie couldn't tell. What she did know was that she had been *terrified*.

And as soon as she was in the car, Stevie had booked it for the station. Where she knew Billy was and while she knew she could protect herself, Stevie needed his stability. Even the thought that Billy, of all people, was more stable than Stevie, made her laugh. Even if it was the truth. Of course when she got there, Stevie had immediately felt foolish and didn't bother to go in and report the incident. Because it *wasn't* an incident. It wasn't.

But then it happened again.

This time, she'd just dropped Dustin and Lucas off at Mike's place. It was late, verging on ten o'clock. The moon was high and the clouds obscured any other form of light, giving the surrounding land an Upside down vibe. Stevie had just pulled out of the Wheeler's driveway when a red jeep appeared behind her. She didn't give it much stock until she realized that for the last four turns, the jeep had kept pace with her.

She suddenly felt lightheaded and tight in the chest. Thankfully, Stevie was just about to turn onto her street and was debating on whether or not to keep going, when she saw a patrol car parked behind a grove of trees. Probably hoping to catch a speedster. Stevie counted her lucky stars and gave no pause of thought as she drove down into the path. Leaving the jeep no choice but to either follow her in or keep going. They kept going. And luckily for Stevie, the patrolman was none other than Billy, who looked half asleep in his slumped over coffee-induced haze.

After two days of stalking, Stevie was at her wits end. She couldn't sleep, eat or even leave her house or work without carrying the baseball bat to her car. And she carried it *everywhere* . When Billy and

her met up for a lunch date, she brought it. If she was going to pick up the kids, she took the bat with her. Stevie was not going to leave anything up to chance.

Stevie just wished Billy hadn't cancelled on her last minute. She wished Max and Lucas' datenight hadn't matched up with hers and Billy's. And she especially wished she had reported the stalking, then maybe she wouldn't have gotten shot.

7:57 pm

Billy could strangle Max. He could strangle Lucas too, but Billy didn't want to deal with the hassle that was the Sinclair clan. He'd really been looking forward to this date, he had it all planned out too. Billy had seen how stressed Stevie had become since Tommy was arrested, had seen the way she pulled away. It was getting to the point where Stevie was afraid of her own shadow.

And reminded him of *before* .

Before she was happy and sarcastic. Before they started dating. Before graduating and before the little touches and glances. Stevie was reverting back to her high school self and Billy *despised* it. He thought with the arrest everything would go back to normal, that they could like before. No bullshit, just the truth laid between them.

"Hey! Douchebag! We're gonna miss the arcade if you don't pay attention," Max yelled, leaning forward and jabbing Billy in the arm. He winced at a particular jab that was surely going to leave a bruise.

While Billy smacked one handed at Max, Lucas squeezed forward on his other side, hot breath making Billy change his attack to the boy. "Why'd we take the cruiser anyway?"

"I've got a late shift tonight you little shit," Billy eventually gave up and focused back on the road. He was not getting killed by his sister and her boyfriends need to ask twenty questions. "So, while you're

having fun. I'll be working."

"He's going to see Stevie," Max sang, dragging Stevie's name out.

"Oh. Here we are," Billy said with false cheer, putting the car into park. "Now. Get out."

"So rude," she said with mock offense. As Lucas hopped out, Max gave him one more jab before following. "Have fun with Stevie," she paused half way out. "But not too fun. I'm not ready to be an aunt."

She'd barely closed the door before Billy was speeding off. As he glanced back in the mirror, Billy caught a glimpse of Max flipping him off and Lucas holding the door open with a fond half-smile.

8:19 pm

Stevie hummed softly to herself as she walked into the condo, dropping her keys in the bowl and shedding her jacket above it. After a long day of work and avoiding people at all cost, Stevie was tired. She couldn't wait for Billy to come over and they could sit and watch TV while enjoying some well deserved Chinese. With Billy, Stevie felt safe. She felt protected and knew he felt the same, she just wished he was there with her. Because even knowing she had her bat and Billy was just a radio away, Stevie felt- off.

"It's all in my head," Stevie laughed, her breath coming fast as she quickly turned on the hall light, then the kitchen. She quickly moved from the light switch and on to the fridge, where she opened to grab a drink. She froze as she reached for the water, her heart beating a rapid tattoo against her breastbone and a layer of sweat instantly breaking out across her forehead.

Turn around.

She wasn't even given a moment before someone was knocking on her door. With a yelp, Stevie spun around, slamming the door closed

and closing the note inside her fridge. Her vision was dizzy from her panic and every breath came in short pants as she edged towards the living room where bat lay against the couch.

Her fingertips had just touched the smooth wood when the knocking turned into insistent banging. The sudden aggressiveness had Stevie dropping her bat, her fingers just too sweaty to maintain their hold. But it was after, as she firmed her grip, and was edging towards the door that the power went out. She stiffened and had half a thought to turn and run to her bedroom, where her walkie sat untouched on her nightstand.

As she just started to truly contemplate it, there came a loud crash from behind her, disrupting the eerie silence that enveloped the house. She instantly moved towards the door, suddenly realizing the immediate danger she was in. Instead of walking outside, Stevie instead walked into the door and even when she yanked on it, the door refused to budge. With panic bubbling in her veins and a blurry vision inhibiting her, Stevie spun around and raced into the kitchen.

Just in time too, as soon as she crouched down behind the counter, two voices could be heard whispering heatedly to each other. She couldn't make out what they were saying, but Stevie knew it was nothing good, especially when she caught her name amongst the whispers.

Firming her grip around the bat, Stevie hardened herself for what she was about to do. And she would do what she had to if it meant walking out of the house alive. She'd kill a man if it meant seeing Billy again. This last thought spurred Stevie into action and as her two attackers stepped into the kitchen, Stevie stood up and *swung*.

She didn't know who she hit, but by the choked off scream he made, Stevie knew she'd hit her mark. And as one of the guns went off, Stevie ducked down and slid out of the kitchen, making a split decision to head to her room. She'd grab the radio and shimmy herself out of the window above her dresser, hopefully before they figured out where she went. Stevie was going to use the power outage for the blessing it was.

Of course, Stevie didn't count on the shattered window in her room

or the way everything already looked to be thrown around. It was like she'd just walked into warzone and realized that maybe her attackers had been here before. And that thought had Stevie diving across the bed, shaking fingers scrabbling for the walkie that sat like a beacon of light.

"Where'd the bitch go!" One of them yelled, pained grunts seeping out around the words, making them slur together. Indistinguishable words answered him and was quickly rebutted with a, "go get her dipshit!"

Stevie fell off the edge, taking sheets and pillows with her. But at least she had the walkie in her hand and she had her bat. With a sense of confidence that seemed to come from nowhere, Stevie stood up and slammed herself against the wall beside the door, slipping over broken glass and crumpled clothes.

With the bat pressed against her heaving chest, Stevie waited with baited breath for them to come through the door. And as soon as they did, she swung again, clipping one of them in the shoulder and a second swing took out the legs of the second person. She was going in for a third hit when one of the guns went off.

Pop. Pop .

It took Stevie a moment. A long moment for her to realize why the ceiling was suddenly above her and the ground was at her back. When she turned her head, Stevie found her bat lying a foot away, something dark was moving towards it and at first Stevie thought it was one of her assailants shadow, but Stevie vaguely recalled the lights were off so that couldn't be it. And then, like a switch had been turned, Stevie suddenly felt immense pain, the kind of pain that would- if she hadn't been already- have knocked her to the ground. Instead she let out a weak whine, letting them know she was still alive.

"Fuck! We gotta go man. We gotta go," the one still standing wheezed. Stevie attempted a glare, but eventually gave up when the world seemed to spin. "She's a goner. Let's go!"

For a moment, nothing was said. And then a cold voice that had

Stevie shivering, “yeah alright. Let's go. She's dead anyways.”

8:23 pm

Billy rolled his shoulders and leaned as far back as he could. The seat was reclined, but he didn't have it all the way back, just in case someone came speeding by or Max needed him. He wanted her to be able to see him, though Billy also wanted to relax at the same time.

“Boo!” The slapping of hands against his window had Billy instinctively reaching for his gun. Of course, as soon as he saw Max grinning from the other side of the glass, Billy cursed her out. If the grin was anything to go by, Max was either unaffected or couldn't hear him. “We're done,” she said cheerfully, sliding smoothly into the back with Lucas following close behind.

“Oh? Are you sure? Don't want me to stop at the store. Maybe a gas station?” Max huffed and smacked him on the arm, right where she'd pinched him. Billy winced and decided to head out to Lucas' house to drop the kid off and then Max before heading to Stevie's.

It was silent as they drove, but not a bad one. More like how family should be and something Billy had only just started to experience. He didn't think he'd ever feel that outside of Stevie and Max, so having Lucas be one of those people was surprising. But also- not really.

The silence was lulling, so obviously the peace couldn't last. Billy had just turned onto the road that led to the Wheeler's and therefore Lucas' house when his radio went off. The noise was loud, a screech of static that had Billy nearly swerving off the road and Max and Lucas crying out in shock from the back.

“The hell was that?” Lucas yelled, grabbing the edge of Billy's seat to stabilize himself.

“I don't-” Billy didn't get anything else out, as he was abruptly cut off by a voice coming over the walkie. Stevie's breathy voice sighed over

and had Billy shaking with a sudden need to see her, the fear that something was wrong suddenly overcoming him.

“Bi-Billy,” it wasn’t a question. If anything, it was a demand, a demand to be heard, to *listen*. With sweaty hands, Billy scooped the walkie up and pressed it hard against his ear. ‘ *Fuck*,’ he wished Max and Lucas weren't with him. If they weren't then he'd be over to Stevie's in a heartbeat.

“Billy,” she wheezed again. “*Billy* I've been shot.” Something inside him froze, he could feel his grip tightening on the steering wheel and his neck prickling with a familiar sense of danger. His Stevie was in *danger*. “I need- I need help. *Please*. ”

Ignoring the fact that he had two teens in the back of his squad car and was probably committing about twenty violations; Billy pressed down on the gas *hard*.

“I'm on my way. Just stay on the line sweetheart.” He ignored the alarmed shouts from the back as he did a vicious U-turn.

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

So, writing this took way longer then I expected. As in, three weeks overdue, yikes! Hopefully, this makes up for it a little and no one's lost interest.



Chapter 11

PSLARDIN

"We all suffer, but to be a victim is a choice."

-unknown

Hawkins, Indiana

May 9, 1988

8:45 pm

The drive over was nerve wracking. Max and Lucas hadn't said a word since Stevie called, and neither had Stevie. Which had Billy's heart just about ready to hop out of his mouth. He didn't want to think of the reasons as to *why* she wasn't answering him or why she'd gone silent. He didn't *want* to think.

He didn't want to think about the way Stevie's breaths had gone wet and raspy towards the end. He didn't want to think about the possible injuries those assholes had dealt her. And he *definitely* didn't want to think about the possibility of arriving too late. But with how fast he was going Billy was making damn sure he got there.

When they hit Stevie's street, Billy expected to be greeted with flashing lights, an ambulance- the whole shebang. But there was nothing, no one and Billy feared. Not for himself, no, but for Stevie. He was suddenly seized by a horrifying feeling that he was too late. That not only was Stevie on death's doorstep, but her killers were gone. Free to go on their murder spree.

It was when he haphazardly stopped in front of her house, that Billy saw it. The lights were out, nothing unusual there, no neighbors standing around, which made sense since it was practically nine at night, all of that was fine- nothing to write home about. Except for the security bar fixed firmly against Stevie's front door. As soon as Billy saw this, he instantly turned to Max and Lucas, moving his walkie at them in hopes one of them would take it.

"Call Hop and *stay here*," Max let out an outraged squawk while Lucas took the walkie. He looked skeptical, but it was easily shadowed by determination. He gave Billy a stiff nod, while Max stared between them.

"You can't go in there!" She angrily gestured at the house, her face scrunched up and red, "they could still be in there."

Billy leaned into the backseat, cupping the side of her face in a rare display of affection, "you know I have to. Perps or no perps, Stevie's in there and I'm not leaving her."

They stared at each other for a long moment, Max eventually gave in. Glancing at her shoes, she gave a heavy sigh and a resigned nod. "Go get 'em."

On his way out of the car, Billy made sure to grab his spare gun. He tucked it into his waistband, not wanting to scare any unsuspecting neighbors before he made it to Stevie's. Of course, getting up to her front door and ripping the stick out of his way, was a completely different feeling. Before he'd been nearly overcome with terror, but now Billy could barely contain his fury.

To corner your victim like *this*. As if they were no more than an animal being hunted- it made him sick. There was no honor in trapping your prey, trapping *Stevie*. When Billy got his hands on whoever did this, well, it wouldn't be pretty. He just hoped Hopper got here before he got to their perps or else there wouldn't be anything left to arrest.

He kicked the security stick out of the way and practically ripped Stevie's front door off its hinges, getting inside produced no further clues as to where she was. At least, until he entered the kitchen. The sight had him freezing, memories of Neil trickling into the corner of his mind. It was a bloodbath, there seemed to be smears everywhere, leaving no imagination to how far Stevie had gone to protect herself. Billy couldn't contain the satisfied smirk, it was good to know she hadn't gone down without a fight. Now, if only he could find her.

It really wasn't that hard to figure out where they'd gone, all Billy had to do was follow the blood and destruction. He'd known what he may walk into, he *knew* Stevie wasn't at her best, but he truly hadn't expected how in bad shape she really was. It had Billy freezing in his tracks, suddenly unsure what to do or who to call. Did he go back to the car and call Hopper instead of relying on Lucas and Max to? Did he go in search of the assailants in case they were still here? Or did

he stay and hope an ambulance got here in time.

Billy's choice was made for him when Stevie released a quiet whimper. It was more of a breathy sigh than anything else, but the amount of pain that escaped in that one sound had Billy instantly at her side. He didn't know where to start, there was just so much blood, but he figured Stevie wouldn't give him a hard time lifting her shirt to get a better view of the situation.

“Shit!” He needed an ambulance *now*, there was at least two bullets and from the looks of it, only one was a flesh wound. “Stevie honey? You awake?” The response was less than awe inspiring, it was a mix between a moan and whimper, and barely constituted as either. It was so quiet and disheartening. “Just-” *Don't die* . “I'll be right back baby. I'm gonna grab your first aid.”

He didn't want to leave her, not if he could help it. But without an ambulance and Max and Lucas not knowing how detrimental it was for one, he had little choice. So, making the decision that he *prayed* wouldn't bite him in the ass, Billy quickly tied the bed sheets around her stomach and hastily made his exit.

The bathroom was just as it had been the night before. Pale yellow walls with foam white trimmings, a mirror and a sink against the far wall and a small square window perched above the toilet, which was squished between the counter and shower. Billy ignored all of these and beelined for the counter, where he knew the first aid kit was tucked away under the sink.

With the supplies in hand, Billy returned to Stevie's side. She hadn't so much as twitched since he'd left. As he finished off the last ace bandage, Billy heard something. It was a distinct noise, one he'd heard a million times, through high school and at the quarry, and was something Billy shouldn't be hearing when Stevie lay directly before him. He glanced between Stevie's prone form and the door, biting his lip, Billy acted.

He made it outside just as the beemer ripped through Stevie's garage door, he ducked, shielding his head and distantly hearing Max and Lucas yelling in shock. Acting more on police instinct and self preservation than anything else, Billy pulled out his gun, internally

promising Stevie he'd fix the car as he fired three consecutive shots. One pinged off the license plate, the garage's debris making Billy squint. The second shot bounced off the driver's side mirror, making the car jump to the right. And the final shot slammed into the cars back windshield, the bullet sliding through the driver's arm and making the car swerve off the road, crashing against several mailboxes before coming to a stop against a nearby tree.

“Call Hop Max!” Billy yelled over his shoulder, making a cautious path to the steaming car. Out of the corner of his eye, Billy could see Max yelling into the radio, vaguely making out the words *‘shooting in progress,’* in what was clearly Flo's voice. In the same moment he was looking at Max, another shot rang out. Two things happened quickly after that, Max meeting his eyes- a strange look he'd never seen before marking her face and then a feeling of the worst kinds of pain. It was as if everything Neil had ever inflicted on him was radiating from his shoulder. He'd never felt so much pain before.

And then everything came flooding back in, his senses overloading to the point he was wincing and collapsing to one knee. Unable to hold his ground under a sudden bout of lightheadedness, Billy barely managed to groan again that Max needed to call Hopper. Or at least he thought he did, everything felt slow- like he was waking up after a midday nap and thought it was suddenly nighttime. He could see Max's mouth moving, even from where she sat in the cruiser still, her face ghostly white. He wasn't able to understand what she was saying, but from the way Lucas was holding her back, Billy figured it had something to do with her coming to him. Which- *no*. Billy wouldn't be able to live with himself if Max got hurt too.

He couldn't live with himself if both his best gals got injured.

9:27 pm

Jim was just trying to enjoy a night off. He hadn't had one since the start of these murders and with the arrest of Tommy and subsequent

lack of them, Jim figured this was the best chance he'd get. Of course, since this was Hawkins, Jim would never get the opportunity to sit back with a cold one.

He was just finishing up some of Tommy's arrest papers, a cup of lukewarm coffee pressed to his lips, when his walkie went off. He would've ignored it since technically Jim was off duty at the moment, but that quickly got dumped when he heard Max's frantic voice over the waves

"Hopper! Stevie's hurt!" There was a muffled noise, sounding vaguely like Lucas talking to her before she came back, "come quick, please. Billy's in there!"

Jim stiffened, his world zeroing down to those two words- *Stevie's hurt*. What did that mean? Who hurt her? It couldn't have been the murderer, Tommy was *here*, in one of the many cells lining the station, so it couldn't have been him. *It couldn't have*. Of course, all those thoughts went out the window when Flo bustled in, the door bouncing off the wall with the force of her run.

"Chief! There's been a shooting on King Street," Flo pressed against his desk, her chest heaving and her hands planted firmly before her.

Jim didn't have time to answer her when Max's voice came back over. "Oh shit! Billy's been shot," her words were punched out, breathy and filled with a kind of panic that only a sibling could feel. Jim barely spared Flo a glance as he grabbed his gun, badge and hat, his pace frantic yet thorough. As he made it out into the main hall to grab his coat, Flo trailed behind him. Her sight set on calling in any on-duty and off-duty officers.

As he left the building, Flo's words trailed behind him, "we have a possible shooting on King Street. Possible officer down, requesting additional units." Jim felt a sharp ache at the thought of Billy being hurt, of *Stevie* being hurt. If they were, there would be no place to hide for whoever did this.

May 10, 1988

6:47 am

“-fingerprints on her mail. We'll check the car for more prints, but with the footprint in Iaconna's car and the ones in Harrington's house, we may have a match.” Which meant Tommy wasn't their killer, Jim sighed, weary with exhaustion and the fear that Stevie wouldn't make it through the day.

He stood outside her room, the receptionist's phone pressed to his ear and an unlit cigarette stuck between his fingers. Powell released a heavy sigh, making everything go staticky for a moment, before waiting for a response.

“Get the prints and I want an expression order on the tests. I don't want any chance of our guys getting away,” he grimaced at a nearby nurse, noticing the impatient tapping of her shoe against the linoleum. His five minutes were up it seemed.

“Wait-” Powell yelled. “Wait. How is he?” He didn't have to say who, Jim knew exactly who Powell was asking about and felt his own barely contained concern reemerge.

He glared at the nurse until she backed away, “he's alive and pissed as all hell. Just itchin' to get back at the bastards.” Powell huffed a laugh, easing Jim's concerns for the future. He missed laughing with Powell and Callahan- hell even bantering with Billy.

“Bet he's just smarting for his girl,” the sound of papers shuffling took over for a moment. Only to clear seconds later, “I'll head back to the scene and if I find anything, you'll be the first to know.”

The nurse was coming back, this time with the receptionist. “Call me second,” he said hastily, tucking away the nicotine. “First call you make sure as hell better be CSI.”

“You got it,” Jim barely had time to hear his reply before he was slamming the receiver down. Giving a cheeky smile to the staff, Jim easily made his way down the hall and towards Billy's room. He'd go

see Stevie, but since she'd only just got out of surgery, Jim figured she'd forgive him.

The sight of Billy sitting up, his feet dangling over the edge of the bed, shirtless and with a scowl on his face, was such a relief Jim had to lean back against the door. The respite was short lived, however, as soon as Billy saw *him*, the full force of his glare was directed away from his sister and the nurse. At least Max looked relieved to be out of his line of sight, though her face was still a pasty white as she gaze at her brother, as if he would disappear any second. The nurse hastily slipped away in the ensuing silence, having finished her task of putting his sling on properly.

“Finally. We need to move,” Billy slid off the edge of the bed, his socked feet poked at his nearby shoe. When Jim didn't answer, Billy shot him a look, “what? What's that look on your face for?”

“You need to rest,” Jim carefully edged towards a seat, hoping Billy would take the hint and sit back down. “Powell and Callahan are on it. And we'll have the prints in less than two days.” *Hopefully, probably*, Jim couldn't help but think as an afterthought.

“What? No!” Jim flinched at the tone and Max steeled herself by the window. “We need to go *now*. I know who shot Stevie.”

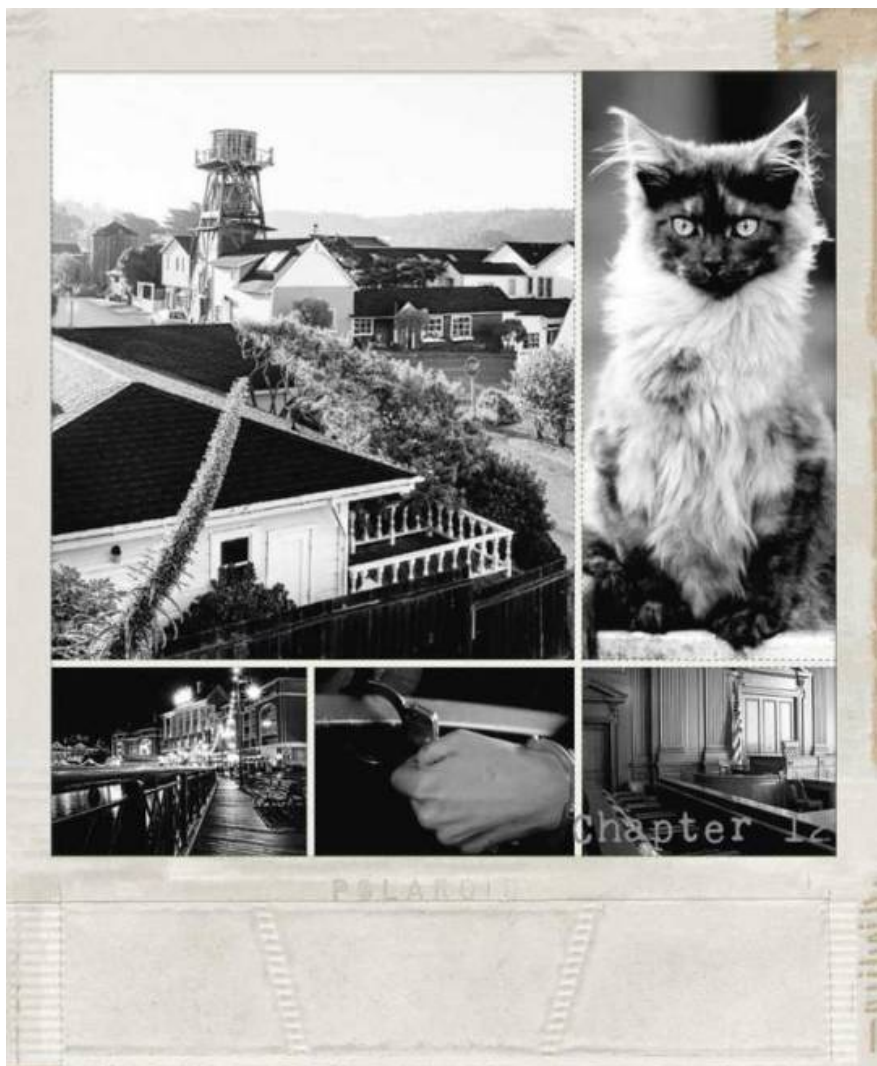
Notes for the Chapter:

Either one or two more chapters. I'm thinking one more, but I'm not totally sure.

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

So, this is the last chapter of *Lawless*. I started this back in April after watching an episode of *Murder Calls* and didn't really have any clear thoughts or ideas of this making it onto AO3. With help and support, I was able to post this story into the monster you see today. I'd like to thank everyone who's read this story from the first day I posted *Lawless* and I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did writing it.



"Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it"

- Tori Amos

Mendocino, California

March 19, 1989

6:27 am

Stevie liked the ocean. It was like traffic, always moving; a push and pull of constant motion- the tide comes in and comes out. Like breathing. Stevie liked it, the routine of it. And she liked California, with its carefree attitude and wild people. She'd never been to such a free spirited place, but it made Billy easier to understand.

She now understood why he was so angry to leave. She understood the hatred and resentment that seventeen year old Billy had harbored, but couldn't understand how a man like Neil Hargrove could've ever lived in such a wild and free state. And maybe that was why they left, too free minded, too spirited, too *uncontrollable*.

Stevie liked that about California. The organized chaos that seemed to pour from every nook and crevice. The way people dressed and even *walked* . It was cathartic. Stevie needed some catharsis. If Billy hadn't suggested taking a break from Hawkins, she feared she would've been hiding away from everyone. Refusing to deal with-*everything*. But California allowed for her to deal with it all slowly, like the waves slowly and methodically eroding away at the sandy beaches. Pushing and pulling, taking and receiving.

She needed California like a bumble bee needed pollen.

Hawkins, Indiana

May 10, 1988

8:22 am

Troy Iaconna. Jim felt like he should've known. Maybe if he had read the signs that had so clearly stood out when they were younger. Maybe if he'd listened to Mike and Dustin about the quarry- if he'd talked to Martha or even Troy himself- *maybe* none of this would've happened. *Maybe* .

James Wich. The kid was clearly just a mouth breather with no creative thought of his own. Just a kid following his friend like a loyal and obedient dog. Maybe if he'd pushed a little more in that diner, asked *one more* question. Maybe the kid would've cracked.

Maybe.

“Your friend already confessed. So, why'd you do it?” His stare was cold and calculating, *‘expressionless,’* Jim thought.

Troy leaned forward, the urge to lean back almost overpowering in its intensity. Jim refused to cower. “Why not?”

March 19, 1989

6:40 am

“You should be sleeping,” Stevie acknowledged this with a shrug, her fingers restlessly moving through Petula's grey coat. The maine coon purred in contentment, having arrived shortly after Stevie sat down on their back deck, her favorite spot was tucked into the back of Stevie's bent knees while Stevie herself liked to have a clear view of the ocean. Which was easily obtained since she could usually be found in their heavily pillowed secondhand chairs. A clear, unobstructed view that showed the ocean only a few streets away, set between red and orange tinted roofs.

“Couldn't sleep,” she mumbled the words, her gaze fixed firmly on the sunrise. Billy sighed fondly, his own gaze drawing away from the ocean and moving to Stevie. He stared for so long, Stevie had half a mind to snap at him. Of course just as she opened her mouth to do so, Billy made his move. He stepped onto their rug, a gift from Joyce and Hopper, the sun glinting off of his shoulder, catching the bullet hole- now glossy and white- before ducking behind Stevie with a nudge to her shoulder.

Taking the hint, Stevie leant forward to make space for him. Petunia let out a discontented meow, her pink nose scrunching in annoyance at Billy climbing behind them, but she quickly settled down when Billy stopped moving.

“Maybe we could go to the beach if you're up to it?” Stevie shifted nervously, her anxiety suddenly rearing and making her sweat in-between her shoulders and at the back of her neck. “Or we could see

the Cosko's?"

When they moved in, the Cosko's were the first to say hello, she'd been too nervous to say hi back and left Billy to do the talking. She'd felt terrible, but whatever he said seemed to smooth over the slight. She thought that would be the last of them, too kind to take offense, but not enough to ignore her distance and aloofness. They easily proved the theory wrong, instead greeting them on their evening walks, sending out invites for the block parties and giving them Petunia from their unforeseen litter. Stevie liked the Cosko's, they were sweet in their old age.

"I'd- I'd like that," she leaned back against his chest, the anxiety sliding away like oil in rain, still there, but a little less obvious. She couldn't ignore the way his grip tightened around her chest and shoulders.

May 10, 1988

8:30 am

"-the thrill was...there's no words to describe it. Being able to almost *taste* the fear was intoxicating," Billy hoped he didn't look visibly sick. Troy looked deranged, there were heavy bags under his eyes-most likely from his and James' run from the law. If not from that, then the ghoulish features could be attributed to the barely sewn bullet wound.

The nurse had barely been given time to see to the teenagers wound before Billy and Hopper had bulldozed in with a warrant and handcuffs. The kid had had the gall to say the wound had come from a hunting accident. *A hunting accident.* Billy would have laughed if the situation wasn't so dire and if Hopper wasn't giving him a look to shut it. If his shoulder wasn't aching so fiercely, the bullet wound sewn shut and an angry red, letting Billy know with every step how displeased it was for the movement, Billy would be right in the thick of it.

Although, it may be a good thing that Hopper was the one to arrest

Troy. Billy might've slammed him a *little harder* against the hospital bed, the cuffs just *that much* tighter. So, yeah, it was probably for the best that Hopper did the arresting and Billy just located James.

"Why Marissa?" Billy asked, leaning back and aborting the move to cross his arms, the sling reminding him of his current predicament.

Troy tilted his head like a dog, "she brought us back *here* ." He spat the words, his face suddenly going dark and violent. It was a whole new Troy and Billy could only wonder if Mike and Dustin had seen this very same thing before Mike jumped.

Jim shook his head, "no. Your mother brought you back. Not Marissa."

"See, that's where you're wrong, *Chief*. "

"Is that why you killed your mother?" Billy leaned forward again, hoping to put Troy on the defense.

"I'm impressed," he laughed, tossing his head back. "I always thought you were all looks and no brains, deputy." Hopper placed a restraining hand on his shoulder, in fear Billy would rip the kids head off, which he was tempted to try. "She shouldn't have brought us back. She shouldn't have even answered *her* . She should've stayed away like I *asked*."

Jim tapped his pen against the files. "So, you were angry with her?"

"I was *pissed*, " Troy lunged forward, his teeth bared and his neck muscles bulging. "Fuck this town. Fuck all of you and fuck them!"

" *Them?*" Billy asked, he had feeling, but he wanted Troy to confirm it. "Who's *them*? Marissa? Your mom? Stevie?"

"All of them," he bit, "especially Stephanie Harrington. I never would've been caught if she'd just kept her nose out of my business. It's all *her* fault."

March 22, 1989

1:20 pm

Stevie had good days and bad days.

The good days usually found her willing to indulge Billy's requests to go out. Sometimes they went to the pier, where Stevie liked to sit and watch people walk by. Sometimes it was to the beach, where she could watch Billy show off surfing boarding and exercising- sometimes he indulged her want to roller skate (though he wasn't very good). He usually just walked alongside her when she felt the urge. And then, sometimes, they took a short walk down the street- either to the bi-weekly block parties or just to stop by at the Cosko's. Petunia usually accompanied them to her grandparents.

On the bad days, Stevie didn't want to do *anything*. She just wanted to hide inside, maybe with a book, or maybe outback with Petunia to cuddle. Those days were like rainy days for her- no matter how beautiful it was *outside* , all Stevie could see were the imperfections, the constant need to shy away from others. On the bad days, Stevie couldn't stand to be around others. At every floorboards groan, Stevie was flinching in fear- waiting for an intruder to step out. At every whine of the house, she was running to Billy or calling him to come home- terrified and waiting for a gunshot to ring out. Those were the worst days, and were getting less frequent in their consistency since they left Hawkins.

Billy and Petunia made it better, easier to handle. If only a little bit.

Chicago, Illinois

June 3, 1988

8:00 am

"Tell me again why the trial is in another state?" Jim sighed, his eyes almost rolling into the back of his skull.

"Because, these murders are too notorious now. The journalists made

sure it got all the attention it could possibly get,” Jim said, passing his watch and badge over to the security officer. Billy quickly followed suit, his badge, belt and lighter lightly being placed in the plastic bin. “Besides- the judge wanted neutral ground for the jury *and* the families.”

“Hm,” Billy quickly replaced his things before trailing after Jim. “You think she's ready for this?”

Jim winced, he didn't know how to answer that. He couldn't possibly understand what was going through her head and he honestly didn't *want* to. Stevie hadn't been the same, but really, who could blame her? Jim certainly didn't, God knows Billy didn't. He just wished- he wished Stevie would *talk* to them, but that seemed like a tall order at the moment, especially when she refused to even acknowledge them.

“She's going to be fine,” he decided on. The words left a sour taste in his mouth, and from the look Billy was giving him, the feeling was mutual. “She has to be.”

April 4, 1989

8:27 pm

“How ‘but this color?” Billy held a soft yellow up for her to view. Up against the light it was almost white in its paleness, something Stevie found to be relaxing and filled her with a sense of warmth. At least, that's what her therapist said- finding colors that made her feel safe and happy, was something that could possibly help her recovery.

Stevie didn't believe it, but she was willing to try. For Billy.

“I like the brown,” she whispered, fingering a slip of light tan, almost beige. While she did this, Stevie also used it as an excuse to inch away from a man that had come up behind her, her anxiety making it almost impossible to breathe.

“Brown is good,” Billy stepped forward, smoothly sliding between her and the other customer. “We could put it in the sunroom. Or maybe

the kitchen?"

Stevie nodded absently, her gaze focused on making sure the man stayed away, "I wouldn't mind a blue for our room. Something light."

Without hesitating Billy snatched up a color she didn't catch, with a flourish he held it next to her face. The movement broke her concentration, a shocked noise squeaking out of her. " *This* . This is perfect!"

"What- Billy?" She rolled her eyes, the anxiety slithering away to the shadows of her mind. "What are you talking about?"

He graced her with a childlike smile, so sunny, Stevie had to squint just to see what he held out towards her. "Look. It matches your eyes." Stevie blinked several times, completely taken aback. But she had to agree, the brown was so soft, like honey, with flecks of other shades of browns and even a hint of green. It should've been ugly, hideous even, but something about the color immediately set her at ease. "And this will look kickass!"

Stevie snorted, grabbing the brown card and peering at the baby blue he'd grabbed. To Stevie, the blue reminded her of *his* eyes. *Beautiful*. "I love it."

June 3, 1988

8:00 am

"Ms. Harrington? Can you tell us- in your own words- what happened the night of May ninth, 1988?" Billy pressed forward in his seat at the back of the courtroom, eager to make sure Stevie was okay. Mr. Rodson, the prosecuting attorney, stood before Stevie, who sat high up in the witness stand. She was pale and withdrawn, her shoulders hunched and her fingers visibly trembling as she took a sip of the offered water before her.

"I got home around 8:15, 8:20," she started, licking her lips. "I was- I was waiting for my boyfriend when it happened."

"And what happened Ms. Harrington?" Mr. Rodson stepped forward to lean against the pew, his gaze gentle and voice prompting.

"I was thirsty," she whispered it like it was a curse. "I was thirsty and I opened the fridge and saw the note."

"Keep in mind," Mr. Rodson turned to address the jury. "The note was later found to have the same handwriting as that of Troy Iaconna. Which was compared to one of his homework assignments. Please continue Ms. Harrington." This had the jury stiffening and glancing suspiciously at Troy and his defense team.

"Okay, okay." She twisted the cap closed, "I didn't even have time to really close the door before someone was in my home." Mr. Rodson stepped away, giving Stevie time to catch her breath. "They chased me to my room. Which was when they-" she stopped, her breath coming short. Billy leaned forward even more, causing the couple in front of him to send a nasty glare, which he ignored. Somehow, he managed to find and catch her gaze, allowing her a semblance of calm in the storm. "They shot me and left me for dead."

"Did they say anything before they left?"

"Yes." Her gaze tore away from his and went to the jury, "yes they did."

"And would you be able to recognize that voice? If it were to speak again?" Stevie nodded, her gaze leaving the jury and fixing on Troy and James.

"Judge Owens, I have a recording that I would like to play for the jury and Ms. Harrington." The judge nodded, his turkey neck jiggling. Mr. Rodson proceeded to step back to his desk, where a little tape recorder had sat for the duration of the trial.

"-if she'd just kept her nose out of my business. It's all her fault." Stevie visibly flinched, her face becoming even paler, if that was possible.

"Ms. Harrington? Do you recognize this voice," another nod from her. "Can you identify that voice for the jury today?"

She leaned forward, making sure her face was close to the mic, "yes.

That's the voice of Troy Iaconna. The same voice I heard that night."

"Thank you. That'll be all." And with that, the judge called for a recess. Billy quickly stood and followed Hopper out.

"What about the footprint? The fingerprint on Stevie's mail and his confession?" Hopper gave him an exasperated look, allowing Billy to catch up once they made it out of the courtroom.

"He'll mention that next. Rodson just wanted to get Stevie's confession over with so she didn't have to wait around," Billy paused, realizing the subtle kindness Mr. Rodson blessed Stevie with. "Don't worry kid, they'll both be getting life."

"I hope you're right."

May 9, 1989

3:34 pm

"Hey baby," Billy whispered, pushing the sliding glass door closed behind him before heading to where Stevie sat in her corner. Petunia lay across her lap, an oddity, yet not unpleasant. Once he was close enough, Billy scratched her behind the ears, pressed a kiss to Stevie's cheek and then ducked behind her, so he sat with Stevie pressed to his chest.

She squirmed for a moment, making herself comfortable between his spread legs and fixing Petunia, so she too was happy.

"How are you?" He wrapped his arms around her, helping to fight off the afternoon chill that had started to set in. "You should be inside with the losers."

"I just needed a moment," Stevie rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. "How's Max?"

"Good," he followed it with a kiss, "and Max is just glad to be graduated and on her way to college."

"I can't believe she got accepted to the University of San Francisco," while the drive would be long, Billy and Stevie decided it'd be worth it. For her, it'd be worth everything. Especially when she and her brother were the only reasons she was alive.

Billy's grip tightened, tugging her closer into his pectorals. "You didn't answer me." She hummed, confused. "How are you?"

"I'm-" she paused, giving herself time to *really* think about it. Before the shooting, Stevie was happy and safe in her ignorance- her naivety. She was content to go about her life thinking she'd be invincible. She was foolish to think she was. Just because she evaded the demogorgon and its pet demodogs a few times. Although, no one expected their life to be torn down in the form of their home being stalked and attacked.

But now? Stevie was content. Not all the time, but for that moment she was. Of course, she'd still have bad days, but those were coming around less and less. The good days came more, especially now that Max was here and while only for a couple weeks, the gang had come along too. It was good. Not great or fantastic, but good. She was content.

"I'm happy," she decided on. The words not tasting bitter and only finding truth behind them. "I'm really happy."

June 6, 1988

5:36 pm

Stevie sat nervously beside Billy, her grip tight and sweaty. Mr. Rodson stood directly in front of them, only separated by the gate. It had taken three days for the jury to come to a decision, in that time Stevie had slept a total of five hours and had barely eaten. To say the least, Billy was worried, which was obvious in the way he hadn't let Stevie out of his sight. Stevie was flattered at first, but now she was just annoyed.

Although, in that moment, as the jury walked in, Stevie was so glad

he was there. She was so thankful he'd stuck around, even after high school and the shooting- when all she did was push and yell. Sometimes screaming and swearing at him, calling him the nastiest names. All in the hope that he would leave her to wallow, of course, Billy Hargrove wasn't that easy to push away. With a squeeze of his hand, Stevie tuned back into the proceedings.

"We the jury find the defendants, Troy Iaconna and James Wich, guilty of two counts first degree murder, attempted murder, stalking and breaking and entering." The woman took a deep breath, her shoulders slumping and her eyes carefully meeting those of Stevie's. She looked *tired* , and Stevie could only sympathize. And then, the words clicked: *guilty*.

Someone started sobbing, heart wrenching sounds that made Stevie wince internally. Her shoulder was jostled, causing the noise to cut off and making Stevie realize that *she* was making the noise. But- *guilty*. They were guilty and would never see the light of day again, Stevie sobbed again, grabbing Billy's shoulder and jerking him into a hug.

They were *guilty*.

Notes for the Chapter:

Also, as a last note. While this will be the longest story I've ever written, it will also be the only one for a while. I do have a few small one shot ideas that I've been playing around with and hopefully those will be out soon. Thank you again for all the love and support!

Author's Note:

This story is based off a real series of burglaries and murder(s). The link to the real events is below.

[wsbtv](#)

Lawless does not entirely follow the real murders.

There is excessive dramatization and please, *please* do not take this as an insult to the real victims and just enjoy the story for what it is, a story. Thank you and enjoy!

If you want more Harringrove come check me out on Tumblr at: [TumbleTree](#) where you can submit prompts or just come hang out! Or you can come hang out on my side blog: [BumbleBee](#) where I post Marvel, 00Q, Cherek and other ships!

Comments and Kudos are appreciated!!